...DIES SELECT LIBRAR...

JOAN'S GREEN YEAR

BY

E. L. DOON

Ex Libris
C. K. OGDEN



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

JOAN'S GREEN YEAR



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

JOAN'S GREEN YEAR

LETTERS FROM THE MANOR FARM
TO HER BROTHER IN INDIA

BY

E. L. DOON

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1913

COPYRIGHT

PR
6007
D7285j

PREFATORY NOTE

I HAVE to thank Messrs. Partridge & Co., Ltd., for allowing me to reproduce, on pp. 254-6 of this book, the incident of the Organ Grinder which has appeared in the *British Workman*.

E. L. D.

1013402

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/joansgreenyearle00dooniala

TO KEITH CANTLEY FROM HIS SISTER.

THE MANOR FARM,
PELTON, September, 24th.

I EXPLAIN to myself why I missed my letter to you last mail and find the reasons satisfactory, but too subtle to put into intelligible language. Rest satisfied that some news is the better for being rolled like a snowball, instead of being decimated in scraps and fragments, especially when it travels thousands of miles to be read. Let it remain at that.

You are that particular soul to whom I can grumble when I feel like grumbling. 'Thank God for that,' I exclaim fervently.

Laura is well again, and my five months' strenuous servitude to her and her children has ended. Her sisterly gratitude should have made me feel amply repaid; it was affectingly sincere, but I was oppressed by the conviction that I deserved it. Do not imagine it was not willing martyrdom on my part. Yet it *was* martyrdom. In all my life it has never happened to me before to have no mental leisure, or, to put it into other words, no time to think beyond the things

my hands find to do. I ceased to regard myself as Joan Cantley—the Joan Cantley I had hitherto known —and I ceased to take any pleasure in myself.

I am beginning to love myself again—as a wise man tells us to do—now that leisure is once more vouchsafed to me, and I have stepped aside into a country such as that, perhaps, to which the dear Pied Piper led the way. All this is self-indulgent, unmoral, and selfish, but remember, Keith dear, only you are permitted to read my inmost soul. To any but a kindred spirit confession of weakness, or what not, is an error of judgment. Never lift the veil for those who cannot understand.

But I feel as if my soul had grown dull and muddy, and I have run away from everything into the green-land, to live with myself for the time being. I must tell you how I found this place. I was on my journey back to London, with Laura's blessing echoing in my conscience, when suddenly I looked out of the window straight into a beech wood, with a hill rising up behind it, and fir trees clinging to the hill. Something pleasant and bewildering gripped me. It may have been only a subtlety of atmospheric effect, and a longing for you and me to go together up that pathway under the firs, and through the beeches. The something told me to learn to love this beech wood, and the pines beyond it. I closed my eyes, and registered a vow, and after a long, long time I arrived in London.

That evening I wrote to Lady Jane to tell her I

must postpone my visit to her, and also to four other kindly hostesses to whom I was booked for a round of visits. I threw them all over, and I am here, a paying guest at the Manor Farm, Pelton. I desired quiet, and I am happy in its realization. That was not an inevitable result ; and realizing this, I rejoice the more.

The house has a gentle ingratiating interior. You know my way of letting interiors grow upon me. This one has an atmosphere and inflowing sense of grave harmony. It is large and rambling, its congruity and simplicity are appreciable to my happiness. If I had come face to face with anything in it ostentatious, I should have grieved over it as over a piece of injustice. I did not.

There is fine old furniture, some prints that would make you envious, and old china and pewter. The name of the people living here is Wartley. They are good old stock, and have been tenant-farmers here for six generations, and sufficiently out of touch with the world that hitherto has been my world to delight me.

With the coming of the present Mrs. Wartley some ten years ago, several modern touches must have been introduced, pretty enough, but to be deplored. That she loves her pretty trifles is not a great offence. She does not see them incongruous. The elder Mrs. Wartley, her husband's mother (who lives with them), has this instinct of fitness, but wisely keeps her own counsel. An old portrait on the stairs looks down humorously and benignly at me. She was

John Wartley's great-grandmother. She knew Carlyle when he was a boy, and kept his friendship to the end of her life.

I like my hostess. She is distinct and clear cut in character as in feature. If you have read your *Paracelsus* lately, know she reminds me of the wife of Paracelsus' friend, a character, it seems to me, Browning has sketched with unmistakable liking. I appreciate John Wartley's kindliness—he is not brilliant. His mother is, perhaps, the most interesting study of the three. The two boys are angelic or devilish as the mood takes them. I must recall that last qualifying word. To apply it to a solemn fascinating cherub of three and a half, or to a young rogue of five is preposterous.

The whole family might go into a novel, which means I am whole-heartedly interested in them. I love human looking-glasses, to gaze into, to wonder over, and study, to draw conclusions from, to love or despise, to appreciate, or mentally to shake by the scruff of their necks.

A farm fascinates me. It is such a great wholesome thing, a broad-minded, honest means of livelihood, sane and soul-stirring as a fine epic poem.

There is one piece of news I must not forget to tell you. When I made my plans to stay at Pelton I connected the place with no living soul I had ever met. Imagine my surprise to discover that your old chum, Bob Ingleby, and his sister Margaret live here. I have not come across him in the three days of my

sojourn—it is a pleasure to which I look forward very soon.

Fancy coming into country wilds to enlarge one's experience of human nature! I am doing that; increasing my knowledge of the subtleties, the delicate nuances of light and shade which find expression in human souls. One man's or one woman's experience of life's emotions is sternly limited, it seems to me. We want the experiences and emotions others have felt to pass before us to enlarge our knowledge of life. It may be second-hand knowledge, but it proves edifying. I love to observe an emotion or an experience I myself have never encountered.

I claim a discovery—one of the autumn joys of the country is gathering. It is altogether different from summer gathering. Nuts of all things give the greatest joy in the getting, after them mushrooms, and then blackberries and flower seeds.

Gathering is a leisured light-hearted employment. It is almost impossible to imagine the sorrowful going a nutting or even blackberry picking. I speak from experience, a new experience. May Wartley, and I, and the children went blackberry picking yesterday, and found some nuts by the way.

I have walked in my beech wood. She was shimmeringly beautiful in her iridescent green robe. The sun was low enough in the sky to light up the grey smooth trunks. He was low enough to light the under side of the leaves.

I should like to have some gracious fragrant association with this place to take with me through life. As I walked something of the spirit of this silent wood filled me—a glad thing to have experienced—for the spirit of place too often eludes one—and the spirit of place in this wood was tender, shy, and silent.

It drew near to the time of nature's sleep for the night, and nature's ritual appeals to that which is mystical and silent in us.

II.

September, 30th.

I was relieved to have your letter. A vague sense of unrest had seized me. I knew all was not as it should be with you. My spirits rose when I learned that the sum total of the evil was a broken arm. I do not know what would reveal a great disaster to me, but I should be aware. For my sake, do not do foolish things, Keith.

I have met the Inglebys, and I will tell you of the meeting. I walked through the village one morning. I frequently walk through the village. It leads me to that Beech Wood. At the Doctor's gate stood the Doctor. His name is Basil Cameron, and he is a hard-working, tough, intelligent man. He had been introduced to me the day before by my host, John Wartley. He was talking to the occupants of a dog-cart—one man, one woman—and he desired to make them known to me, as they were near neighbours.

I looked up at them, and they looked down at me. You can guess—the man was Bob Ingleby. We were frankly and enthusiastically glad to meet, and not

afraid to say so. To have called him Mr. Ingleby would have been to walk on stilts, and I prefer my own feet.

Do you remember he was staying with you when I went to my first Ball (it deserves a capital letter)? You were both in the hall as I came down the stairs in all my new war-paint and feathers, with Alice behind me with my fan, cloak, and etceteras. I confess I have never had a prouder, vainer moment, than when I heard you both mutter "By Jove!" Such moments are cherished and exquisite recollections, written indelibly on a woman's brain.

I had never met his sister. I believe you did once. She is Mrs. Derston—I already think of her as Margaret. She married miserably, and after four years returned to the old home. The remaining sisters are married, both parents are dead, and she and Bob live together. She has brave eyes, and a radiant smile. She is the sort of woman who should make motherhood a beautiful, ideal thing. But, she is childless. Bob has a large farm. In his big cheery way he asked—"Sure you are not ashamed of numbering a plain, honest farmer among your friends, Joan?"

I laughed gaily, and told him that the things of the farm, and the hedgerows, and woods were filling me with bewitchment.

He told me one of his sisters had made the fact of living in a farm the grievance of her life. She had been fully persuaded from her earliest years that

people who were not farmers had the utmost disdain for those who were.

"You have regarded us from that standpoint, Joan?" he asked in an amused way.

I had you know, Keith, but there are farmers and farmers, and we know Bob was at Winchester, and he is a great comely giant, and a gentleman. No. I could never be ashamed to number Bob Ingleby among my friends.

"We do not put ourselves on the footing of our landlords," he laughed—"we are plain, simple people, easy-going and careless when things go right."

A bit of Thoreau rose up into my throat and I could not resist uttering it—"making the yellow soil express its summer thought in bean-leaves and blossoms rather than in wormwood!"

I felt Bob metaphorically pat my back, so genially did he say—"Ah, if you love your *Walden* you will know already that in the country we must not be ashamed of a multitude of small interests in the place of weighty ones. The afterglow and the fragrance of little things is often very appreciative. If people do not discover that, country life is not for them!" He paused a moment, then he asked suddenly—"Have you ever compared Gilbert White and Thoreau with each other?"

I begged the result of the comparison he had evidently made—a little amused I must confess, to go back to those old days when you and I read these

books together. By the way, I shall always be grateful to our father for making us love the old classics while we were children. I rejoiced to hear the good dear names, White, Thoreau—would it be Lavengro next, I wondered, but it was a little startling if I may say so, to discuss them familiarly at a casual meeting with one I had not seen for years. Bob leaned over the dashboard to say:—

"It seems to me, though both were naturalists of the first order, they were as different as men could be. White observed with the scientific mind, simply for the sake of the thing seen, to gain exact knowledge, to verify facts from intense interest in them as facts. With Thoreau it is not the facts themselves as facts. He observes for the sake of the poetic impressions the facts yielded him. His is the philosopher's pleasure in nature, or the poet's." It struck me this was a bit of true criticism.

"Have you always loved these bed-rock books?" I asked.

"Since you taught me!" he retorted promptly, and as you can guess I was taken aback. Bob looked indulgent. "Do you remember fetching down Pepys to controvert something your father said? You proved yourself right too. It seemed to me rather splendid to have a working knowledge of these old Johnnies. So I humbly followed your lead! I have often secretly thanked you."

I could not feel anything but gratified.

I wonder if Hearne, Masefield, Chesterton,

Maeterlinck and other names of to-day are familiar to him. I did not like to ask.

And all this came about because I happened to remember Thoreau's beanfield. I love to trace a conversation back to its source sometimes.

Mrs. Derston has called upon me since that open-air meeting. She is the eldest of a family of four, and Bob the youngest. I should say they are eminently adapted to make each other happy. It is not necessary to restrict this saying to married couples, is it? Margaret's seniority tends to keep Bob young. She makes his interests hers, whether legitimately they are so or not. She is neither student nor scholar, but she is clever, alert, and appreciative. She inspires.

Also, she has a big, natural grip of things. She amused me with the village verdict concerning myself. "I am the lady from London. I do not walk as if I was familiar with country mud, but I ain't against passin' the time o' day when I meets a body." Thus speaks an old labourer—Davy Snow.

I was inquisitive. I asked about the people I had seen in church. The Vicar, it seems, gained the good-will of the congregation by deciding, when he came here two years ago, that he could not possibly please everybody, therefore he would please himself. He is town bred and this is his first experience of a country living. He is judicious and tactful. Mrs. Marshall is appreciated because she can visit the cottages without repeating in one that which she has heard in

another. It is accounted to her for wisdom. They are a middle-aged couple.

The figure-head is Mrs. Cameron. She is the Doctor's step-mother, and she has one daughter, who, since my coming has been away from home. She returns, however, to-day. Mrs. Cameron is only happy when she has the leading part, I gather—I look to her for the comic element in my days. She is a mixture of self-assertion, energy, kindliness, piety, and lack of charity—yet able to agree in friendly concord with Mrs. Marshall, and the gentle little Mrs. Wartley, senior. I liken her mind to a whirlwind.

III.

October, 5th.

I AM glad when Mrs. Wartley has an errand for me that introduces me to the cottages. To-day, I took some beefstew to Davy Snow. I knocked at the cottage door ; a man was speaking within. "Sandy, old dog, I am clane bate, I don't know what I shall du ! " I knocked again, and he clattered to the door and let me in, still muttering 'clane bate.'

I had heard his story.

A month ago his wife died, and there is no one to look after him. As I sat down, he was miserably aware that the room missed the orderly hands that for thirty years had kept it spic and span.

'Liza Snow had died suddenly of heart disease, thus Davy had served no prentice hand in learning to shift for himself. He left 'Liza apparently well that last morning, and before noon he was called from his work to find her—dead. She had been an astoundingly house-proud dame, and I shuddered to think of her feelings, could she now behold her dust-laden belongings.

"I feel right bewildered, and ill, and clane bate,"

he told me. Sandy, the wise old sheep-dog laid his jaw on his master's knee and eyed him with compassion.

The Doctor had told me that three women were waiting to be asked to 'do' for him, and he can afford to pay for any service. Any one of them would do her best. But Davy will not be made comfortable. Again, the Doctor divined the cause. For thirty years Davy has gone in fear and trembling of offending 'Liza. She was good at heart, kindly in her way, but inordinately jealous. Davy was fond and proud of her, and content for the grey mare to be the better horse. On a few rare occasions he had innocently enough raised her jealousy. Now, though the grave had closed over her, he lives in the old dread of going contrary to her wishes.

"'Liza wouldn't like no pryin' neighbour 'bout the place touchin' and fingerin' her things. It would hev been different if she had laid abed for a bit and talked matters over, and I had heerd her wishes. As 'tis I'm clane bate," he muttered.

He looked hopeless and helpless, and I welcomed a sudden inspiration, and asked if there were no relation of his own or 'Liza's who could come and live with him.

He stared at the fire, and after a long silence, spoke.

"'Liza's nieces be likely wenches, but I understand one is going to be married, and one keeps house for her father. There be the youngest, and 'Liza thought well of her."

I believe I clapped my hands. Anyway, I urged him to go and see her, and bring her back, wherever she may live.

"I'll think on it!" he said, and scratched his head. At this I left it. But this thraldom of a living man to a dead wife is pitiful. How will it end? 'Liza will never be really dead to him so long as he lives in fear of offending her.

I had thought the country all peace and serenity, and quiet easy monotony. But that is reckoning without humanity. Where it is, grey trouble and sore anxiety are never barred and bolted out.

I did not tell you in my last letter that Bob Ingleby has for some time been engaged to be married to Ruby Cameron, the Doctor's sister—because when I wrote I did not know it. If I could have called her *Pearl* Cameron, you would have gained a better impression of her. She has the gentleness of the pearl. Rubies should flash and sparkle and be true to that wonderful Browning thought of them—"courageous at heart." She is very loveable, and just the kind of *little* woman I always imagine strong masterful natures like the Bob Inglebys of this world should love and marry. I am not quite sure though, that Ruby Cameron has a big enough heart and soul to be quite worthy of your old chum.

I am glad I have put myself into a new setting for a while. When we get away from our ordinary and every-day surroundings, the atmosphere of our inner lives becomes rarified. We review ourselves, criticise,

and realize ourselves as we never do when we are filling our own niches. We stretch the limitations of our beings ever so slightly for the time being. We do well to realize that the mind needs frequent bracing. A new range of thought, a new idea, give us fresh vitality—even worrying about old Davy Snow's future is wholesome.

IV.

October, 11th.

The cows answer to lovely flowery names—Lilies, Cherries, Beauties, Strawberries, Daisies, Fannies, Roses. I am obliged to write them in the plural as there are duplicates of all these, which shows lack of enterprise and uncommendable limitations in those who name them. I hear the cowman call them home for milking—"Corfe, corfe," a pause, then again, "Corfe, corfe" (that is what it sounds like), followed by a cheery, wheedling—"Come, my dears." At that, they start a solemn, willing procession up the road, and past the house. We have the strong, beautiful raw material that makes art. We do not need picture galleries as town folks do, while for some indescribable reason, the country teaches you to reverence art.

I wrote this yesterday when all was quiet and serene. To-day is disturbed, and all that yesterday was not. This does not apply to the weather, which is happy, but to a sense of hustle, bustle, and general post. Not that we are changing camp, but many others are, for this is October 11th, old Michaelmas Day, and the date when cottagers change cottages, farms are given

up, and new tenants take possession. Think of the hubbub of feeling this must occasion, and you won't wonder if we all feel the quivers and quavers in the air, which touch sensitive chords in us.

At breakfast this morning a waggon went by laden with cottage furniture, and a woman and two babies on top of it, with a small boy, the husband and the team-man walking beside it.

"The Newberrys!" May Wartley said, and sent Alec out to stop the waggon. She was about to provide the whole family with tea and bread and butter, and we carried it between us, so that there was a large breakfast picnic in the road. No one receives hot tea without genuine gratitude, and we learned that no kettle had been boiled that morning, neither had Mrs. Newberry been to bed. The waggon had arrived the night before. They had twenty miles to go, and the burden of Mary Newberry's cry had been, "Get me there in time to put up the bedsteads in the daylight."

Even I have been here long enough to feel a twinge of regret at this flitting, for Jimmy Newberry is the hope of my life on Sunday afternoons. I have been cajolled into taking a class of imps, and Jimmy is the most intelligent imp among them. I forebore to speed him with the platitude, 'Be a good boy.' Instead, I hoped he would be a credit to the next patrol of scouts he joined.

Other waggons laden with household goods passed during the day.

Keith, Keith! here have I been rambling among things that do not touch the inmost me. I was amused, and I knew you would like these glimpses of real life. Now my heart is burning. A friend is in distress, and I must share the distress. This is your friend too. John Wartley brought home the news, and I will tell you as briefly and clearly as I may.

This is the date on which a landlord gives a year's notice to his tenant if he requires him to vacate his farm. Bob Ingleby has had such a notice. Lately there has been a growing fancy hereabouts, among the working classes for small holdings. An Act of Parliament allows land to be taken from farms in occupation to provide them. Bob's landlord tells him, the reason of this notice to quit, is the fact that certain of his fields are demanded for this purpose. The fields specified are the best land on the farm, the greater part of the remainder is light sandy heathland. Of course, the notice to quit is a form, and Bob can continue with the curtailed portion should he choose. But John Wartley hazards the question as to its being worth his while, as the working expenses may not be greatly lessened.

"If this had happened to us," exclaimed little Mrs. Wartley, "John would have been well nigh crazed."

And they told me that even to-day there goes out from his farm in an adjoining parish a man who has thus relinquished the whole, because, considering the amount he has invested in implements, horses and

stock, he cannot see his way to go on, but most of all because he has lost heart. He is a broken man, they say, years older than he was one little year ago.

You notice so far I have not allowed myself a single comment. I have told you bare, naked facts.

This afternoon I met a man on horseback. His face was grey. He flung himself from his saddle.

"Well! how are you?" he asked, as he gripped my hand and did his best to smile. Of course, it was Bob Ingleby.

"Sorry at heart!" I told him, and added—"I have heard the black news, and I want to understand it, if it is not prying and interfering of me."

"I'll tell you!" he said quietly as we walked on together.

"The government does not realize that the country has vital need of men who *can* farm their land, not of men who can only starve it. The men who made this law for putting others into small holdings taken out of well-farmed land, know nothing of the grind and struggle of farming, above all they do not know what the land itself needs if it is to be fertile and productive. We men who keep large flocks of ewes know the value of folding the land over with sheep. Our hoggets are on the turnip fields the winter through, and highly fed with cotton or linseed cake. The small holders have no sheep. Besides, their one thought is to get the utmost from the land for a few seasons, and put next to nothing into it. I speak of what I see. There is a holding that was bought a few

months ago by the County Council. It is so foul they are obliged to let the man who takes it up to-day, have it rent free for the first year. I doubt if it ever gets properly cleaned of the twitch. Foul land, and horses that are mere bags of skin and bone make up the story of many a small holding."

We had come to the hedge of a wide, open field, and men were busily at work upon it. We stood watching them, and he told me they were sowing wheat for the next year's harvest. "It will be the last harvest I shall gather from it; it is one of the fields they are to take from me. I and my fathers have farmed it for two hundred years."

"I'm glad I understand!" I said miserably, and feeling sure there were reservations. A man does not often tell a woman the full measure of his woe.

I believe I tried to say something to cheer him. He thanked me.

"It is the injustice of it that rankles!"

I wanted to say something quite different, but nothing that I could put into words expressed the sympathy I felt.

"You are longing for the office of good Samaritan?" he asked kindly.

"Ah, yes!"

"Then come along home with me, and talk to Margaret about the autumn fashions, or the new novels, or the latest scandal; anything to change the current of her thoughts. She is a good deal upset over this."

Just then Dr. Cameron came up in his motor. I left Bob to talk to him, and I went on to see Margaret Derston. I did not talk of novels, or fashions, or scandal. She would not have listened to me if I had. We just went over the miserable matter once more.

"It is going to be a grievous trial to him," she said, "gathering and gathering in force until this day next year. And this day next year the climax will come—the land will go from us. It isn't as if Bob farmed several farms, or as if that which he has was all good land."

And we two women tried to thresh out the matter to the best of our ability.

I talked it over again with John Wartley on my return.

"Is it a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul?" I asked, for I wanted to understand this thing.

"It's nothing else," he said.

"But you say the small holder is not successful as a rule?" I still plied questions.

"I should say he is rarely a success in this neighbourhood, whatever he may be in districts where he can turn his holding into a market garden. That is another matter!"

"But, anyway, he is better off than the labourer?" I smiled at myself for my persistence.

"I should not say he was! What with 'taken work,' and harvest wages, I should say the labourer is decidedly the better off. Men with small holdings

work early and late in one continual struggle for a living. Think what a wet harvest means to them. Look here, Miss Cantley, I sold only yesterday the barley of a man with such a holding as we are discussing. It had shot,—sprouted, you know. It was valueless to the maltster. You can guess what it means to him."

As I looked into John Wartley's face, I compared it with the expression I have seen on the faces of city men. I know something of the strenuousness of their lives. I realize how brain is pitted against brain, how the fever and fluctuations of the money market grip them. The rise or fall of stocks and shares may have hideous issues.

Here was something different. These men, who are at the mercy of wild incomprehensible Nature, can never engage in a hand to hand struggle for supremacy. They cannot war with her at all. They are helpless and they know it. She may smile at them, and all is well. She may hide her face, and their corn is blackened and grown before it can be stacked. Here are men who ever stand face to face with uncertainty. The look I caught in John Wartley's face I have seen in other men's, who stand as he stands, face to face with might, and force, and power incomprehensible. Their very helplessness gives them courage, and the heart to smile when life is leaden within them. One thing they do fight for, and that strenuously—that hope shall not die within them. Keith, are these the men that a government

ought to burden and discourage, and drag down? Already, they are overweighted. They are very brave, I think ; even the weaker ones among them struggle forward as best they may.

V.

October, 18th.

I AM thankful the arm is mending. Now that I know you are debarred from polo, I do not feel so keenly that I am waiting at the end of a wire for news that might be alarming. I hope this habit of mine of filling my letters with the life around me, does not bore you. It seems of more worth to write thus, than of myself and my doings, and the trifles of news that concern our friends. I know Laura keeps you going as to the happenings of the family circle, therefore I strike out this line for myself.

You must take out my last letter to see that I ended with a talk with my host, as to the injustice to Bob Ingleby. I want to go on where I left off, which takes me back to the date of my last letter, after it had been posted. I found my way down to the Doctor's house to offer Ruby, Bob's fiancée, my keen and lively sympathy. Forgive my free use of people's Christian names after but the shortest acquaintance. It is my habit to call them thus to myself, not necessarily to their faces at all. It puts me mentally on a more familiar and friendly footing with them. I hope they do the same to me.

Bob had himself seen her and told her of his great trouble. I think he must have kept himself under the sternest self-restraint, for she seems not to realize the importance of it. Its injustice does not sting her into fury as it does me, and the rest of us. She seems to think we overrate the evil.

I was so full of it all, and ruffled like an indignant turkey. She was calmness itself. I try to feel that this is almost a blessed thing, as she will soothe and calm Bob's troubled spirit far better than we fussy folks can. For all that, I longed to rouse a spirit of wrath within her. I goaded her and progged her ; finally I said desperately, "Do you know how greatly he will have to reduce his flock of sheep?"

She opened her eyes wide, but it had little meaning for her. She did not grasp that it would imply not only less to sell, but a great loss to the land itself.

"Bob doesn't really mind a great deal!"

She said that, Keith, and she believed it. After that I bade her good-night, and came home at a furious pace to quiet my spirit.

Yet if I were Bob I could love that little girl idolatrously and desperately. I know the masculine heart well enough to realize how she appeals to all that is strong, and tender, and protective in it. There are some women to whom men take their troubles, there are others from whom they hide them. It is not always the woman he loves best to whom a man will unburden himself.

You wonder when I return to town? I have almost

made up my mind to live one little year of my life day by day, week by week, month by month with fields and hedges, and woods, and hills and country folk. It will be an experience I shall love to look back upon when I am an old woman with a green memory for the past. I think I shall call it that 'dear sweet year.' Do you remember what a favourite adjective *sweet* was with old Izaak Walton? "I will leave them to their sweet labour," he says of bees. I suppose you will guess by this that I am reading *The Compleat Angler*. I am revelling in it, and loving Honeysuckle even better than I did before, if that were possible, because he loved it as he did.

I met Davy Snow this morning. He has tried to secure 'Liza's niece, and failed. The old fellow could only describe himself as "claner bate than iver."

He had tramped over twelve miles to the niece's home, and put the matter to her family. He told the story thus:—

"She sez to me. 'I'm sorry Uncle Davy! It be this way. We are to have a double weddin' come Saturday fortnight. 'Tisn't only Polly is goin' to be married, but myself too.'

"I jist turned about and kem home again, wie Sandy beside me, Miss."

That was Davy's tale of woe. I found no words with which to comfort him, and mere platitudes are insulting.

"We'll git along as best we may, the old dog and me." Then he rested on his stick, and stood still to

emphasize his words. "Lord! how we du miss her! There wasn't no comin' home to cold grates, and cookin' of wittles for ourselves in her time. 'Liza war a good 'un, she war!"

Man and dog looked into my face as if equally they understood the hopeless state of affairs. I wish I could make him see the ridiculous side of his attitude.

I said as much to the Vicar when I met him a few minutes later. He is a sensible elderly man, who I believe might have a fellow feeling with Davy if Mrs. Marshall were 'called hence,' though he does not suspect it himself.

"I grant there is a comic side," he allowed, "but not to Davy, Miss Cantley. Time will bring him to his senses. It is possible that within a year he will be amenable to reason, and, as likely as not, to a —second wife."

I had never thought of that way out of the difficulty. It was an inspiration. But who—who will marry ugly, ghost-ridden old Davy?

I have seen Bob Ingleby two or three times this week. I was practising at the organ in the church on Wednesday and he came in, and sent the boy away and himself blew for me. Suddenly, he left off and came and sat in one of the choir stalls.

"Do you know what it feels like to go about under the impression you have handcuffs on you?"

I knew he was thinking of this horrid land question. And I felt he expressed just what I should have experi-

enced in his position. It is always interesting, however, not merely to concur, but to go just one better, so I answered:

"I know what it is to feel as if some restless little devil had driven me out of my own body, and taken possession of it, and called itself—me."

Truly, Keith, I did feel like that sometimes when I was with Laura.

"Better that, than the grip of the handcuff, I think, Joan," he said soberly.

It seemed clearly my mission to try and hearten him.

"I have my own black moments," I told him, "but the glad heart must rejoice. You have a glad cheery boy's heart, Bob. It's clouded now by this unwholesome miasma of injustice. I claim the privilege of an old friend, and plead with you not to shut up those gay merry valves. Don't slacken hold of things"—

"I wish I could treat this thing in a devil-may-care manner. If I could, I would. When my father died, I was eighteen. I took the reins into my own hands and found things in a fairly hopeless state of muddle. I set my teeth, and I worked for all I was worth. Now, after ten years I have straightened out the tangle, I have paid off a heavy debt of borrowed capital. I felt solid ground beneath my feet. It is cut away, and once more I am crippled. What have I done to deserve it?" He was standing now behind me.

You see, Keith, what a tragedy this thing is.

Something told me not to remind him, that he had Ruby to cheer him. With all my heart and soul I regretted he had no mother. Words rang in my brain—"As one whom his mother comforteth." They haunted me. I suppose most women, when a man excites their pity, feel the protective, maternal instinct. I wanted to mother him. This longing made me tongue-tied and stupid. But I said something, and I think it did a little good.

I tell you all this because you and I understand each other. If I had only given you a mere outline of the facts, you would still have known. If a woman brought her trouble to you, I picture exactly your looks, your words, and what your heart would feel. You would long to be kinder and more comforting than might be quite discreet. I felt like that—and for fear of saying too much, I said not enough. Human beings are arrant fools.

VI.

October, 22, 23.

I HAVE a horse to ride whenever I wish. I wish most days for I love the exhilaration of the throbbing life and movement that carries me along. The Great Auk (so he is named) is a bit of a ruffian, but knows I love all his kind, therefore is not unmindful of my friendship. He accepts me as a responsibility, I feel convinced. When a horse does that, you may trust him to the utmost. I often go by the Pedlar's Way. It is grass-grown, silent, and neglected, lonelier than open fields can ever be—at least those portions of it that run between overgrown hedges that shut you in with the silence. It runs in a straight line from the sea-coast across the country. Long ago it was favoured by smugglers. It has nothing to do with this twentieth century, but belongs still to the old dead pedlars, and the greatly daring smugglers. The people regard it with awe that is near akin to reverence. If Robert Louis Stevenson had known it, we should have read of it in *Treasure Island* or *Kidnapped* is it?

The other day I persuaded Margaret Derston to

ride with me. We went across country further than I had hitherto gone, and found ourselves at last on a lonely heath. The horizon was far away, the silence was everywhere, and gorse and heather stretched as far as eye could follow. It was the place for sympathy to grow between two human souls. I have felt for weeks that Margaret and I must draw near together, heart to heart. It is our destiny. I greatly wanted her friendship, and as our horses walked soberly side by side, I asked her for it.

She said a wonderful thing in answer!

She said, Keith, and I repeat it in all humility: "I thanked God last night for sending you amongst us."

I cried out at that.

"We had reached the stage when we needed a Joan Cantley!" she explained, smiling, "and you came. Life in the country sometimes grows curiously grey and stagnant. It is all right if you can go away to the quicker stream of the town; but if not, it is well if someone will come to you and 'stir the waters.'"

I never felt quite as humble or happy before.

She spoke a little of the shadow that lies across her life, those four years of married unhappiness. She did not rail against her husband. She complained of no ill-treatment. But I felt she had been wounded and stricken, and the memory of it was torture still. Perhaps one day she will put these years wholly behind her. She did not want to excite my pity,

and I felt it cost her a painful effort to speak of the subject. It is done, and I believe it had to be done, if we were not ever to feel there was a closed subject between us. Now, we can put it from us altogether.

I wish I had known her in the old days when she was Margaret Ingleby. I do not think she had ridden for years. She wore a long old-fashioned habit, but whatever she wears she wears it with a queenly air. I went back to my own little sanctum. It gave me a hearty welcome. I believe it is May Wartley herself who manages this. It is one of her gifts. A small one, you say; I don't think so; a woman who can make a room express on all occasions a cheery welcome, has learned a charming secret. I should like to feel that I was a true Hedonist according to William Sharp's definition of the word: "The true Hedonism is neither more nor less than cultured receptivity, openness to all thrilling or pleasant associations, avoidance of all that is mean and painful. This Hedonism does not prevent, or seek to prevent due attention to a performance of the ordinary daily duties of life; but it would teach us where possible to throw around these some glamour of beauty or significance, or at any rate not to let them interfere with our serenity more than we can avoid."

It is one of the secrets of happiness I expect, a form of wisdom especially to be sought in the country.

VII.

All Saints,
November, 1st.

Basil Cameron came to see the elder Mrs. Wartley the other morning. Old people feel "the fall of the leaf," she explained to me, and she thinks a tonic will pull her together.

She is a charming little soul, a medley of contradictoriness, with a connoisseur's taste for old furniture. I have long talks with her in the mornings while her daughter-in-law is deep in her household duties. She has scarcely been outside the county, yet she is immensely interested in all archaeological work. The mere mention of excavation of buried cities fills her with excitement. It has been the longing of her life to see the world, and she expends her energies in knitting numberless pairs of grey socks for missionaries. She is Conservative to the remotest fibre of her being. I suppose the Wander-lust is in the blood, for her children, except her son here, are scattered the world over. I do not think any one of them is particularly successful; they are not a money-getting race, I fancy.

After the Doctor had gone, she put on a pretty confidential air.

"Dr. Cameron ought to marry!" she said, tentatively.

I made the obvious retort.

She shook her head.

"Ah," she said, "I fear he won't."

"Why do you fear that?" I was bound to keep the ball rolling.

"Because he cannot marry the woman he loves."

"He loves—?" As I asked the question it dawned upon me whom, it was possible, Basil Cameron might love.

The old lady looked me keenly between the eyes to assure herself I was to be trusted.

"He loves Margaret Derston," she said with firm conviction.

I asked her if this were generally known.

"Only to those who put two and two together. If he does not, why doesn't he marry someone else? There is no dearth of women is there, my dear?"

Whatever she may have to go upon, she is sure of her ground. After all she may be right.

"If we could hear of Hugh Derston's death, you would know before very long that I had made no mistake," she continued.

The dear soul enjoyed opening my eyes for me, and exploiting her own insight.

"I am old, my dear, but I read Basil Cameron's

secret in his face. It would be no unworthy match, and I should dearly love to see it."

I heartily agreed. If I read character at all, I read quiet strength in both of them.

The fact of living in a house with three generations of a family is immensely interesting to this humble student of heredity. It is something I had not reckoned upon when I came here. How we reach back, and back, and back—how little of us is original! The dead are not dead ; at any rate, they relive in their descendants.

VIII.

November, 7th.

If ever I write another novel it shall have a country setting. I will try to make it breathe the soul of the people who live in farm and cottage. I will try to utter the story of their lives as they live them, not to falsify, nor to idealize, but to realize the inwardness and the spirit that rules in them.

I suppose I am led into writing this by reason of a letter I had this morning forwarded from Park Street. It was from Felix Harridon. With it came his recently published novel *London Wares*. I will send it to you as soon as I have read it.

Being not only a man of letters, but a publisher to boot, he is ever on the look out for grist for his mill, and he asks if I have nothing for him. He reminds me I have published nothing for three years. Also, he remarks, he counted on meeting me at Lady Jane's. He was staying there at the time I was due, and he declares he felt cheated when he found I had shied.

He is not well, and hints at taking a rest, by a specialist's order. It is unheard of in my recollection

for Felix to be ill, and I am too old a friend not to worry over it. He is one of those who has touched life at many points with you and me. When we recall Switzerland—he is there. Italy—do you remember that day we went off from Sorrento to Capri—how he loved the blue lapis lazuli of the sea? He was generally the crack shot of you men at country houses. He taught me billiards, for which I shall be eternally grateful to him. And this is the busy London publisher, who read and returned my first manuscript, and came down to see me next day, to tell me there was enough in it to make it my duty to try again. That was our first meeting—and he gave me that courageous motto to which I ever cling: "Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas."

I have much for which to thank him. I am glad to say I never grudge any gratitude I may feel to Felix Harridon. That says much for the man, I think. There are people to whom I should hate to owe a debt of gratitude.

Again, I am writing my letter in instalments. This paragraph ought to be dated some seven or eight hours later than that which precedes it. A great deal may happen in seven or eight hours. And in this case a great deal has happened. The iron has entered my soul. Fired by Felix' letter, I am going to begin a new book. The resolve is like a fever in my blood. Restlessness has come upon me, and a curious aloofness, and exhilaration. I suppose all who write experience these sensations. The commonest every-

day events, for the time being pass as if on a stage. Everything is pictorial, everything is dramatic—and bewildering. A caldron is seething in my brain. I dread to begin the work, yet wild pleasure and excitement buoy me. Mentally, I am panting. I shall feel impelled to begin—soon or late—but I shall keep it a secret from Felix until the book is ready for him.

I hope you had a lovely time at the Governor's ball on Tuesday. I thought of you dancing away with your arm in its sling, and looking twice as interesting as you ought, in consequence.

I meant to tell you of a friendship I have made with a humble cottage woman, a friendship I am proud to acknowledge. Her name is Martha Heskins. She is a busy, capable woman, the mother of a large family. By chance, I found out she craved sympathy—warm, genial sympathy. Such a hunger you never associate with these typical Marthas, and it was the starting-point of our friendship. It is the unexpected that arrests you, interests you, and pulls you up.

I cannot write more to-night with this tumult in my brain. This fulcrum for thought is like a mushroom, a greedy mushroom that needs all the room it can get in a tight place. God bless you—and me.

IX.

November, 15th.

Not yet has my book made a beginning on paper. In the meantime I have no rest. I struggle with plot and counterplot. I select and discard. I pass my days like one awaiting some big event. But I see myself sitting down with pen and paper—perhaps to-morrow morning—in a sunny place. The sun makes a world of difference to my writing.

This afternoon, the smaller Wartley boy (Lincoln he was christened, to Sonny he answers), has been tortured with toothache. I have had him on my knees most of the time. I told him stories when the pain was easiest, rocked him to and fro, and crooned to him when it was worst. And when he slept, I held him close against me. The little flushed face, white brow, and low line of gold hair were the joy of my soul. They touched depths in me, and stirred me to a trembling tenderness, so that when at last I carried him to his bed, I sat afterwards fire-gazing for nearly an hour. I must be growing sentimental I fear. But those hours with the child in my arms have quieted my spirit. I can get pen to paper now. It was angelic of his mother to let me have him.

We have early dinner at one o'clock, tea later and supper at eight, and I have grown to like this simple life more than I could have dreamed possible. Last night, a little dinner party the Camerons gave was quite an event, and a pleasant excitement. It consisted of Bob and Margaret, the Wartleys and Mr. Marshall. The Vicaress was house-bound with a cold. After dinner an accident happened in the drawing room. We were sorting ourselves for bridge. The room is rather small, and the Vicar is rather large. He fell foul of a standard lamp and overturned it. Picture the alarm and confusion. Bob was splendidly unconcerned. He picked up the flaming lamp that was really, it seemed, on fire and ready to burst, and carried it into a conservatory. He put out the flames with a boxful of mould. I quivered with apprehension, and my heart thrilled, yet a sudden pride in Bob's coolness filled me. Ruby screamed, then she fainted. I caught her as she fell. She was conscious again almost at once, and Bob came back to her. I think you would agree with me that the rôle of lover becomes Bob Ingleby. He plays it charmingly.

"Poor little girl," he said. "It was not worth fainting."

Ruby smiled. "You are worth more than that to me."

He leaned a little forward, and for an instant his eyes held hers.

The lamp did it. The incident took them un-

awares, and called it forth. It was next to nothing, perhaps neither will ever recall it, and anyway it was not meant for me to see.

We played our bridge rather soberly after that.

In the course of the evening Mr. Marshall told us with pride and paternal gusto, that his only son was coming home from India on furlough. If you have come across a Captain Richard Marshall tell me what you know of him. The Vicar has taken a new lease of life since he heard the news. He has been in the parish a bare two years, and his son has not been seen here. He is hungering and thirsting to introduce him to the neighbourhood. He was slightly patronizing to the guests to-night. I saw it, and Bob saw it, and he *saw* that I saw, and we had some quiet fun over it. But he bore him no malice. Indeed, he likes the Vicar immensely, and when you like people it is easy to be indulgent to their weaknesses. It is when you dislike them that their weaknesses add fuel to the fire.

Bob tried his hardest to be himself last night. Once or twice I saw the handcuffed Bob. He struggles to get outside this blow, but a thing that disheartens a man is leaden weight. I am glad to report that he has lodged a strong protest. I wonder if the Council will entertain a very reasonable suggestion he has made. It would still mean a loss to him, but a less serious one.

In an adjacent county the Council has bought recently eighty acres, or thereabouts, for these small

holdings, at a prohibitive price—a price so high, that no small holder can pay the rent, that the amount of invested capital makes it necessary to charge. The land lies idle ; and the latest suggestion is the further outlay of a considerable sum of money to buy horses, implements, and all that is needed for the Council to farm it on its own account. I wonder if the acquiring of this land meant a deep hurt and injustice to the man who was called upon to relinquish it—these eighty acres no one will hire.

What a magnificent thought it was to make the dying sapless leaves beautiful in death! The thought was driven in upon me this morning, as I faced my beech wood in a glorious burst of autumn sunshine. Margaret Derston had overtaken me, and I was obliged to pass it on to her. She agreed, but presently she pointed to a wheat field. Up and down in a thousand, thousand lines ran the drills of the young green blades—the youngest of all vegetation at this stage of the hoary old year. It is to face the rigour and bitterness of winter. Come what may, we shall see that which will be the summer's wheat harvest through the winter months.

"I should not have realized this if I had been in London," I remarked to Margaret.

"The romance of the soil is giving you immense happiness ! " she laughed.

"I would not have missed it for the world ! " I said, and felt it too. I am glad and happy and light-hearted. Life is a bigger miracle than I knew. I

must get the spirit of all this into my book, Keith, that people in towns may realize a little of what I am learning. I know now how it is, that these men who live by the soil can be brave and hopeful in the face of grievous odds. The earth breathes a beautiful graciousness and courtesy, I think.

I amuse Margaret. Where she is calm and deliberate, I am impetuous and hot-headed.

When we reached a white cottage standing alone, she proposed to take me in and introduce me to the occupier. She is unique—a woman scholar in a cottage, and the survivor of a remarkably gifted family. Humble cottager though she be, she has decided views of life and politics. It seems, she owes a good deal of what she is to her father, who besides having a little land, was a rat-catcher, a musician, an astrologer, a reader of abstruse medical books, and a lover of Shakespeare. It takes my breath away. I was duly introduced.

"No," she said decidedly. "I never was a Tory. I'm a Whig" (mind you, she is eighty-nine), "and a staunch one. If I'd had the management of affairs the National Debt should have been paid off by this time. It's crippling the country, and laying taxes on babes unborn."

Her father was a keen Cobdenite.

"I can tell you what Cobden wrote in a pamphlet," she said shrewdly.

"'The old Lady of Threadneedle Street is uneasy, and there is cawing in the Rookeries. Let them that

have gold keep it and not sleep another night with notes in their houses.' A fortnight later some big banks broke, but my father had taken the hint with the few pounds he had saved."

I asked her if she would recite something from Shakespeare to me. With no hesitation she began—"To be or not to be," and repeated the whole of Hamlet's speech with charming cleverness. She acknowledged her favourite play was *King Lear*. The undutiful daughters, I gathered, filled her with righteous indignation.

Except for six months of married life nearly sixty years ago, she lived with her brothers. Both are dead now, and she lives alone.

"I miss them still!" she said, with a curious ring in her voice, "and I am lonesome without the music—Abel on the violin and William on the flute—that is to say until William lost his finger."

"That was a sore trial. He ran a thistle into it one harvest time, and it gathered and festered, but he would not have anything done to it. At last he took it to the Doctor—it was the old doctor, Miss—Mr. Basil's grandfather.

"'William,' he says, 'you've left it too long!'—and he took it off that afternoon.

"We had no music in the house for months. Abel wouldn't play, knowin' that William couldn't. But at the last Abel couldn't keep silent any longer. He was just forced into playin' by the longin' that was

in him. He went into the parlour, and shut the door —and played.

"William set here by the kitchen fire and listened, aye, and soon was sobbin' like a child. There was no more music for him, and he knew it."

I felt I had been talking to one who knew and belonged to an old England. She talked of dancing round the maypole, and on the village green. She spoke bitterly of a time, long years ago, when much common land was enclosed. Then she became softer and tenderer and pulled out old treasure to show us. Old night caps, a first edition of *Hudibras*, or rather the edition first illustrated by Hogarth. I understand better than I ever have done how full and varied simple lives may be.

X.

November, 22.

I HAVE it in my mind to write you two letters this mail. Each shall have its separate envelope, because two epistles under one cover are slightly appalling. You might say to yourself—my sister has the pen of a *too* ready writer. I do not wish you to think that. Should one letter afford you sufficient reading, keep the other unopened for a more opportune moment. This one shall tell you the principal event of my week ; the other shall gather together the fragments and ravellings of news concerning those in whom I am deeply interested. I want you to feel in touch with them through my heart and brain.

Please remember the world's pulse is slow here.

We do not feel life's mad race with time. We 'go easy.' I fear this habit bites into character. I ought to have gone to London weeks ago to be measured and fitted for a coat and skirt. I have to confess I have been here long enough to feel hurry an effort. Time slid away until last Monday. I have had three days in town.

To May Wartley, or even to Margaret Derston

this might well have been the big event of the year. Even I bubbled over with excitement, and once arrived I tried to do a week's work in three days. I scarcely knew what pieces were running at the different theatres, nor what was drawing the public. I ran in one morning to see Barbara Seaton to hear the news, the gossip, and the scandal. I heard something of all three. The plum, is the fact, that Barbara is engaged to be married. I wonder with what mixed feelings you will read this. Five years ago I have a notion it would have meant a good deal. Enthralled as you were, I think you must have had an underlying conviction that she was not your fate. Anyway, I *knew* she was not, from the beginning, though I could not have told why. She is marrying a Colonel Bailey, a dozen years older than herself. It promises to be a quiet, uneventful future. She looks happy ; and, as you know, nothing has the power to disturb her calm equilibrium. She was far less excited than I was. She asked for news of you, and grieved over the broken arm. I am more puzzled over her than I ever was, and less able to determine whether she is a woman of immense depth of feeling, or unusually superficial. I love her. I regard her as a friend, yet I have never fathomed her. The impossibility to do so frets me whenever I leave her, the longing to do so is the secret of my seeking her out as often as possible. She bid me good-bye with the nearest approach to a humorous smile I have seen her achieve. I am still puzzling wherefore.

With bags, boxes, parcels, and papers, I took my corner seat in the train to return to Pelton, with a sigh of relief. There were things I had missed in London, sensations perhaps, rather than tangible things, such as the feeling absolute silence brings, and the sense of breadth outside. I contemplated enjoying my thoughts and analysing this sense of relief on the journey down, rather than giving my time to sundry picture papers. On this account I regarded the railway carriage as a quiet sanctum. At the last moment a man and a kit-bag invaded it. The carriage door was banged, and the train moved.

We regarded each other. I held out my hand. It was Felix Harridon.

It did not take us long to find out we were both bound for Pelton.

"I did not know you knew the Reids. By Jove this is luck!" he said.

I smiled.

"I do not know the Reids. I am going to the Manor Farm. I am a paying guest there. Sir Samuel Reid is my host's landlord." I felt slightly defiant.

He raised his eyebrows.

"A paying guest at a farm, in November, somewhere at the back of beyond! What possesses you, Joan?"

"Something that tells me it is good for me!" I felt inclined to tell him the unvarnished story, that my martyrdom for Laura had driven me to it. But it sounded egotistical, and I didn't."

"Will you tell me in what way it is good for you?" he asked quietly.

"I am finding myself. It is a wonderful thing to discover unknown possibilities in your own personality, besides unknown limitations, and smallness of outlook, and pitiful ignorances, Felix."

"And are the farm house, and the farm, and the farmer and his family teaching you these salutary things?" he asked laughing.

"You must not think I am joking!" I insisted.

His eyes and his smile said quizzically:—

"You are still you"—or words to that effect.

I felt this was enough concerning myself. I had not forgotten that in his recent letter he had acknowledged that he was ill. I wanted to hear what he had to say of himself. I asked how long he was staying with the Reids.

"Something was said of recruiting for a week, but I don't know. It's awfully good of them to have me this time of the year without my gun."

"Why has your gun deserted you?" Somehow, I wanted to get at the root of things.

"For the present I have deserted my gun. Truth is, Joan, I have been slack for weeks. I and my nerves are having a bit of a tussle."

He looked weary, and older than he should have done.

My thoughtless heedlessness, my impetuosity made me exclaim.

"It's a pity you are not a paying guest at a farm,

and learning the things I am learning. It is tonic, cordial, soothing syrup and pick-me-up by turns."

The words were born on my tongue, and slipped through my lips. I could have bitten out the unruly member directly I had spoken. You know me of old, you know how this habit of speaking first, and thinking afterwards has been my discomfiture all my life.

The suggestion was no sooner made than I felt convinced Felix would approve of it.

He did.

"Among that legion of cures I ought to find one to meet my case," he said brightly.

He rubbed his hands briskly, straightened himself, and looked suddenly desperately alert and interested.

"Joan, you good angel! You are better than an army of specialists. This is the very thing the doctor ought to have recommended. Your inspiration is like a good meal to a weary wayfarer."

He looked at me with that mischievous, amused expression he had worn on the occasion of our first meeting, when he came down and introduced himself —that time, however, there was a delightful deference.

"Would your farm take me in, do you suppose?"

I still ached with self-annoyance. I knew well enough that if this suggestion had come about in another way I should have been delighted. As it was, I felt the misery of being thin-skinned. No one of your sex quite understands how such niceties as this can cause so much suffering. It was the speech it

would have been kind and friendly for a man to have made.

"I fear not!" I said desperately. "The Wartleys do not take paying guests as a rule. I am the exception." I told him how I had fallen in love with a beech wood and had set about finding temporary quarters in its near neighbourhood. I said I had advertised in a local paper and May Wartley had answered the advertisement.

"Shall I also advertise in the same local paper? Mrs. Wartley—that was the name you said, I think —might see the advertisement and be induced to offer me house room."

Instead of answering directly, I suggested that it might answer the same purpose if he prolonged his stay with the Reids.

"How can you imagine that? To be a paying guest at a farm where you learn to find yourself, and new possibilities in yourself, and unsuspected limitations and ignorances, surely savours of adventure, and wholesome allurement such as I cannot hope the Reids' prosaic establishment could afford."

"The things I had in my mind might not appeal to you in the least." It was a relief to know he was laughing at me.

"This isn't fair," he chuckled. "You held out the bait, and now you seek to withdraw it."

"Only because I flung it." I was cornered. I had to be honest and nothing else. Downright truth and honesty sometimes give one too much trans-

parency, but they are the sterling virtues to rely upon. Many a time have I had reason to bless and love them, and my own courage in relying upon them as my best weapons.

"Ah!" his lips twitched.

"I thought so! Joan, you ought to know me better than that, after these years."

I laughed gaily. I might have known Felix would not misunderstand me.

"I ought to have realized how well you know me and my bad habits," I said. There was no need any longer to disguise the fact that I could enjoy looking forward once again to being a fellow-guest with Felix Harridon.

I noticed there was one point in our conversation he had not pursued to its conclusion.

But we had arrived at one of the bigger stations and he procured a tea basket. The friendly eating and drinking fitted into the happy mood of the moment. We talked to amuse each other, and touched lightly on this, that and the other. I told him of Barbara Seaton's engagement. He had not heard of it. His comment was: "Will Keith compassionate her or himself?"

I leave you to take what change you like out of that. No! I will not—rest assured he has never blamed you. Like the rest of the friends who know, he is wholly on your side over the matter.

At last Pelton stared us in the face, writ large on its blue board. A smart motor car awaited Felix.

May Wartley had come herself to meet me with the brown nursery car, and the pony who long ago has left his best years and paces behind him.

Felix came over and tucked me carefully under the rugs. I introduced him to May, and gave him a cheery good-night.

From the station yard our roads lay in opposite directions.

The rambling old house with its distinct atmosphere of peace, gave me a hearty, hospitable welcome. The elder Mrs. Wartley and her son, the boys, and the man to take the pony were all about the door as we pulled up. There was a kind of station excitement, as parcels galore were brought to light.

The elder Mrs. Wartley's—"Welcome back, we've sorely missed you, my dear"—was sweet to hear. It is so long since we had a mother to rejoice over us, and our coming isn't it, Keith! But things like this emphasize how much joy we have missed.

There has been a busy time since I have been away. John Wartley has grown, as an experiment, a small quantity of sugar beet. A considerable amount is being grown in the neighbourhood, and a troop of Dutch labourers has been requisitioned to take up the roots. Thirty of them have been here each day. I feel defrauded to have missed the sight of them.

XI.

November, 23rd.

I WISH I could crystallize the life here, that you could see as I see, hear as I hear. I went to see Martha Heskins this afternoon ; and I came upon something that might have been taken straight from Maeterlinck's earlier work. She and her eldest daughter sat sewing, and presently the youngest child came in from school. She watched them a few moments moving from foot to foot. Then a voice from outside called her—" Rachael—Rachael ! "

She smiled, hesitated timidly a moment, kissed her mother, and went out to the child who had called her.

I watched the little creatures as they went up the road. And when I turned to say something I saw Martha's eyes filled with tears—and fear.

" What is it? " I asked. It felt as if the room had suddenly grown chilly.

" Mother and grandmother say Rachael be struck for death ! " the daughter said quietly.

Maeterlinck's — " The predestined — They are known to most men, and there are few mothers who have not seen them," rose in my mind.

With what I take to have been a fine sense of tact, the girl left us.

"It'll come, Miss, and before twelve months are gone. I knows it, and I've got to bear it!" Martha said.

It seemed to me that foreknowledge, and the awe it created, drowned the very semblance of rebellion in her.

"I puts off lightin' the lamp o' nights as long as I can. I ses to myself: If the child's days be numbered I must make each one as long as I can, poor lamb.

"Last night, Miss, when I tucked the bed-clothes round her, I said:

"'You be that tired, child, you'll be asleep afore you knows it.

"'Aye!' she says, 'but I lies so heavy I a'most goes through the bed.'

"She raised herself up and held me tight in her arms. 'I shall pluck you a rare lot o' primroses and wilets come the time,' she whispered."

I tried to reassure the poor soul, but she only shook her head.

"I durstn't ask her any longer if she feels ill, she looks at me startled and frightened, and allus tells me—no."

It is difficult to say anything before a settled conviction of coming evil such as this. I am telling you of it not so much for the sake of the thing told, as to let you see how things are being presented to me.

Where could I have found anything like that in our London life? All the mothers I know would have put a nightmare like this hastily from them, unless a Doctor had corroborated any fears they might have entertained. This primitive acceptance of the inevitable—if it be inevitable, and time will prove that—survives in this twentieth century only in the simple and, let us say, the uncultured. I put it badly, I mean to say it is something we have lost. I believe it to be some subtle influence of old superstitions, poetic fancyings, and imaginings, and to have been far more general in the long ago. It is a survival, and perhaps another generation, even of the peasant class, will have lost it.

As I left Martha's cottage I came upon Bob Ingleby.

He hailed me with: "I was on my way to bring you these!"

He held out a great bunch of berries, wonderful, three-cornered things of strange colouring—bright rose closing down on radiant orange seed vessels.

"Spindle wood! Did Keith never bring you a bunch after a day's shooting?" he asked.

"I have never seen their like before," I confessed. He was amused at my joy in them. Colour is more alive to me than music. I am no born musician, but I am a born colour-lover.

I proceeded to take Bob into my confidence as to whether it would be feasible to ask the Wartleys if they would receive a second paying guest. I told him of my journey down with Felix.

"Could they be offended?" I asked.

"I do not see why they should," he said rather shortly.

"Felix Harridon is almost as old a friend as you are, Bob!" I was drawn into saying.

"I'm glad he is not an older one! He can't remember you when you emerged from the schoolroom, and went to your first ball, can he?"

"No!" I laughed. "You and I share that memory between us!"

"I score there, then!" Bob said.

A pony car came spluttering through the mud and overtook us.

"How was barley on Tuesday, Sir?" the man asked in passing.

"Made sixteen shillings of my Upper Dams, pretty good colour too!" Bob told him.

It was the man who had turned out of his farm six weeks or so ago, because with his diminished farm he had more money invested than he could spare. He and his wife and five children have gone into a small house, and he is trying his luck at poultry farming on about ten acres of land. Bob does not think he ought to have cleared out, but he had lost heart at having to give up so large a slice of his farm. He had not the courage to move to another.

"Perhaps the same demand will be made there," he had said, "and I can't face it a second time."

The man lacks grit. But we have to accept human nature as it is, not as we would have it—and a

certain proportion does lack it. This proportion does not stand up to adversity. Adversity sweeps it off its feet. He was carrying home wood to make hen-coops in readiness for the spring—poor disheartened soul!

Bob has decided to keep on with the remainder of the Abbey Farm, and if he finds he cannot make it pay, he will give notice next Michaelmas.

"I shall worry through as best I can. If I make a failure of things it won't be because I have not done my level best," he told me soberly.

"Keith is as sorry as I am," I said, and told him what you had written. I think he was glad I had passed on the facts to you.

We encountered Mrs. Marshall coming full sail out of the post office. She was ponderously gay and light-hearted. She is only waiting for Friday's mail to know the exact date of her son's home-coming. Hers, at any rate for the time being, is one of the happiest souls in the parish.

"Yes!" she said naïvely. "And he is coming home without a wife. You think I am a selfish old woman to say that—at least I am an honest one, for it is more than I had expected. Yet when he does make a choice, if it be a suitable one, I shall have to go through all the pretence of appearing delighted. Now, isn't it so?" she appealed to us both. "Mothers of only sons ought to be exempt from this piece of hypocrisy. His father was an only son also, and my mother-in-law never wholly forgave me for

sharing her son's affections with her. She was a more out-spoken woman than I, and she used to say—'Manners should not mock at human nature. Convention clothes and covers, but it does not alter our moral fibre.'"

"But it greases the wheels and makes the machinery work smoothly," Bob said laconically.

"For that very reason I shall hide my feelings when the time comes!" she said gaily. "'Peace at any price,' is my motto," she added.

"Davy Snow is laid up with bronchitis and Mrs. Knight goes in every day to look after him. Davy is almost torn asunder with delight at having his 'wittles' cooked for him, and being made comfortable generally on the one hand, and fear of what 'Liza would say if she could but know, on the other," she told us at parting.

"I fear 'Liza's motto was not the same as yours, Mrs. Marshall," Bob laughed.

"Mottoes, after all, are not things that bear heavy strains upon them. They are charmingly moral, but more for theory than practice, my dear Bob!"

"Even yours!"

She nodded her head half a dozen times in quick succession, and beamed, with pursed lips.

"Even mine. Anthony discovered that long ago!"

Anthony is the dear lady's better half.

She acknowledged it all with no loss of dignity. She is just a dear, delighting old lady, rejoicing in

every fibre of her being at this expected home-coming. Her spirits were infectious.

"And what will this beloved prodigal be like when he appears?" I asked, after the Vicarage gate had clicked behind her.

"I believe he is a down-right good fellow. He has won his D.S.O., and he is remarkably well up in the service," Bob said.

I am to go and have tea with Margaret to-morrow. Bob had been charged with the invitation.

The book progresses slowly. I work in the sunny window of my sanctum every morning, with the smell of a wood fire in my nostrils. It is the kind of solitude I love best. Solitude, serenity, contentment—these have their inner essence. Gloat over your solitude with a keen sense of its enjoyment, and its inner essence steals through your being. This is to attain the best life has to offer so far as these abstract things are concerned.

XII.

November, 30th.

I WENT to tea with Margaret Derston on the morrow of my last letter. May Wartley was to have gone too, but some domestic catastrophe prevented her. I was pleased to have Margaret alone—one may confess to greediness in the matter of friendship, I think. Everything about Abbey Farm is spic and span and neat as a quarter deck. The gravel, the shrubs, the gates, the grass look cared for, and the Manor Farm naturally suffers by comparison. My poor little hostess would rejoice in this neat trimness about her home. I wish for her sake John Wartley realized his procrastination. It would give him much additional strength of character, and she would not feel the prick and pain she does. As well wish the brown owls flew by day.

Margaret wore something grey and flowing. I have a curious fancy concerning her whenever I see her indoors. Mentally, I see her in mediaeval costume, and charmingly it becomes her. Her abundance of hair was coiled round her head. She is dark, but her eyes are blue. Realize her if you can—and

add great grace of movement such as a few of these large, generously-made women have to perfection.

I told her of my fancy for a year's experience of simple country life.

"Experiments in living are—interesting!" she agreed readily.

She looked at me humorously.

"I suppose you regard yourself as the onlooker of our lives. You are amused, repulsed, or attracted according to circumstances. We"—she laughed good naturedly—"are the puppets and you watch to see how we respond to the strings that pull us!"

"I do not think I remain sufficiently detached to enjoy or watch as a mere onlooker!" I acknowledged.

"Ah well. It promises to be a year of some movement and action," she observed. "In the summer we shall probably have Bob's wedding. So far, July is the likeliest month. It is the time between the hay and the harvest, and he would be able to get away for his honeymoon comfortably. If ever a farmer takes a holiday, it is then."

I looked round the warm, cheery room with its soft harmonious colours.

"What will become of you, Margaret?" I asked, suddenly aghast on her account.

"I do not know what I shall do." She acknowledged the fact frankly. "I feel stranded. I have always lived here, except for those four years. I am thirty-five, and I am not a woman who has great

resources in herself. A long leisure does not tempt me."

I glanced at her embroidery frame with a bit of exquisite—pathetically exquisite work upon it. She smiled.

"I can work in spacious rooms like this, but in cramped rooms, or a tiny house—I feel caged."

She threw her head back and smiled.

"What a poor fool I am to talk like this, when all the world lies stretched out before me."

There is nothing more pitiful in this earth than a *wistful* smile such as was hers.

"You are not a globe-trotter. You are not made of the stuff. You are not sufficiently restless," I cried, full of distress.

"Ah, wise child!" she laughed.

"You have parish work!" I said in my ignorance, for I have always thought women of Margaret's type became the good angels of their parishes.

"You think that is what I am fitted for?" she flashed good-humouredly. "I have almost made up my mind to go to London, in my most serious moments, and plunge body and soul into some settlement work. I shall need something to absorb all my energies, I fancy."

It was a sensible resolution for a woman with no ties, and a passage in her life she wished to forget. Yet my heart overflowed with pity. I wanted to cry out: "no—no!"

"I cannot picture you anywhere but at Pelton,"

I cried. "Some lives are coloured by place, others not at all. Yours is coloured, Margaret, by Pelton and all the country round."

"What colour?" she asked softly.

I looked her straight in the face.

"The colour that has more poetry in it than any other, a soft, beautiful purple."

"You fanciful child!" was all she said.

I said purple, because purple means more to me than other colours. God has used it more lovingly and more subtly in Nature than the rest. For me purple has something magical and mystical in it. It appeals to my whole being. It is like a voice, like a sweet perfume.

"I can imagine Pelton without me, but not myself without Pelton," she said whimsically. "But seriously, I must not listen to you or I shall pity myself. Long ago I found out that self pity is to be strangled at its birth. Never pity yourself, Joan."

"I have done it from my childhood up, whenever there was occasion."

"Only pretended, I think; if the occasion had been harsh enough for serious self-pity you would not have confessed it so readily."

I realized that she had gradually pushed me away from her, so to speak, and was holding me back. The reason flashed upon me. I do not need to be told any longer that Basil Cameron and Margaret Derston love each other, and that they are aware of each other's love. They stand with the insuperable barrier

between them—but their 'awareness' is their happiness. I do not in all things pity them as matters now are, but I shall if Margaret puts a hundred miles between them. I believe much happiness belongs to a friendship—if thus it may be called—such as theirs, but how unwise are my words!

Margaret stood 'at the guard' to protect her secret.

A luxurious Persian cat rose from the hearth rug, yawned mightily and jumped into her lap. It was an unconscious protest against her leaving. As if Musa had said: "Let me show you someone needs you."

It is like Margaret, if she have a cat at all, to have the most beautiful of his kind.

"I shall be glad for Bob to be settled. He is seven and twenty, and he and Ruby have been engaged a year. It is time he was married!"

She spoke brightly and dismissed the subject.

I wonder if Bob even remotely guesses what going from Abbey Farm will mean to Margaret. Hers is not a nature made for uprooting.

A little later Basil and Ruby Cameron came in. With her came a sense of extreme youth, joyousness and irresponsibility, with girlish charm. With him a sense of cheery strength, and a watch-dog's fidelity, a keen masculinity.

I promised to spend a day with Ruby in Carminster. We both have shopping to do, and I want to make a pilgrimage to the old city—note, I write pilgrimage

not visit. I want to know its picturesqueness, its ancient buildings, its river. I want to walk in it and feel its spirit, and if I can, to get a little beyond it, and view it as a mass of building from a distance, just about sundown. I cannot feel the soul of a place until I have done that. Ruby was at school there, and therefore has the associations pleasant and romantic that belong to our school places.

Dr. Cameron reported favourably of Davy Snow.

"Ah!" he said, turning to me, "I wish you had known Davy's brother, Joshua. He would have delighted you. He was a character in his way, known for miles round for his knowledge of bird life. I'll tell you what Davy told me one day, and in his own words as far as I can.

"He was talking of plover's eggs. He said:

"'Jos 'ud walk to a gate and see a pair o' the birds. "There be eggs in that field," he 'ud say, "and the birds be showin' me where they be, the silly fools." And he would go, and get 'em too. And he would go fudder than that, for he made a sight o' money by them eggs. He could tell yer how many eggs he should find, and he said the birds telled him that too.

"'O' course,' Davy added, 'he wouldn't tell me nor nobody else how they telled him. But there's not the lessest doubt they did tell him. It might ha' been the way the birds toppled and winarled in the air. I doant know, but he 'ud get his eggs by watchin' them, same as nobody else I ever heard tell on ever did.'"

You know the fascination of bird life for me, Keith, and that I have read many modern books by bird lovers, but nothing like this. It seems to me Joshua Snow touched the pulse of Nature and felt its beating. There must be some mysterious power in such an one. Thoreau had it, I think, and was one of the few who wrote of it—for men do not often write who have a gift like this—they are content to possess it, and often they are humble, as Joshua Snow was. You told me of such a man once, a woodman—and the birds seemed to love him as a god.

When I arrived back at the Manor Farm John Wartley was despatching Alec to bed.

"You go straight upstairs!" he enjoined.

The boy paused a moment.

"Good-night, Daddy, I'll go as straight as I can, but what shall I do when I get to the corner?"

I hugged that beloved little five-year-old.

We get our afternoon letters only by calling at the post office for them. I had stopped on my way, and received a note from Felix Harridon to say he was coming over on the morrow.

He duly came. I will put the telling of his visit into a second letter. Really, I shall have to commence a diary, make a daily entry, and post it on mail day. Your own rough diary is a weekly joy to me. I am glad you told me of the Simla incident. Does it end at that? How we women scent romance! Or does the vision of the blue-eyed English girl you rescued from peril come between you and the daylight?

Remember, if you are my Father-Confessor, no less am I your Mother-Confessor. I should like to have a hint when I am to begin to read between the lines.

XIII.

December, 2nd.

The sounds of the bagpipes in the distance—a sufficiently far distance—get into my soul. They are champagne among sounds so far as I am concerned. I have to put Felix Harridon in the same category as bagpipes. He is human champagne. He rode over, as I told you on Wednesday. Among the first things he asked was: would I like Lady Reid to call upon me? Pure kindness of heart prompted him to think of this, and I could see it was one of the reasons that had sent him over so early in his visit.

"She is the sort of woman who would appeal to you," he urged.

"What sort is that?" I asked, curious as to the type of woman he imagined I appreciated.

He considered a moment before he said:

"A woman of the world, with a big heart, and enough brain to take the ups and downs of life philosophically."

I do appreciate that kind of woman, and I had to allow that he had hit the right nail on the head.

"I hope you give me credit for some slight amount of penetration," he remarked quietly.

"For astonishing subtlety, you frequently astonish me," I said, and I dropped him a curtsey worthy of an old-world minuet.

"Then, I take it, you would like to make Sybil Reid's acquaintance?"

"I have not said so!" I murmured.

"Surely," he urged, "after you have allowed so much——"

"At some past time I should have been delighted. At some future time, if the opportunity come, I shall be delighted, for the present—I think not!"

"Is there an enigma in that—if so, could you explain it?" he begged.

"She would strike a false note!" I said deliberately, and went on to add that it was difficult to explain. Bob Ingleby's words: 'We do not aspire to our landlords,' had come into my mind and constituted the key-note of my objection. Sir Samuel Reid is the Wartleys' landlord. I had already told Felix this as a mere fact. Now I repeated it in order to deduce something from it.

"Though I am a paying guest, I choose in my association with the Wartleys to ignore the fact on all occasions but the one of shuffling a cheque somehow upon them. Life is not long enough to build little gilded cages for oneself. Besides, 'How can a bird that's made for song sit in a cage and sing?' It simplifies everything to throw in your lot wholeheartedly with those with whom you pass your days, if in any way possible. The Wartleys are not only pos-

sible, but lovable and interesting. For the time being, I am one with them. Lady Reid does not call upon my hostess, and for artistic reasons I would rather she did not call upon me, here. My life's melody is being played rather sweetly and softly just now, Felix. The music glides from note to note. It lacks éclat, but I love it as it is ! "

He smiled whimsically.

"The intricacies of a woman's brain are too bewildering for the average man ! "

"I am morally certain you understand and appreciate my objection perfectly."

"You do allow me a little penetration after all. I must be grateful for that. Joan, you are a happy woman ! "

"I do not analyse my own sensations ! I am learning in this quiet little place as I never learned in the wider world, how intimate and familiar joy and sorrow are one with another."

I daresay I am to blame over this determination of mine, because I am under the impression that he told Sybil Reid about me before he came. If this be so, I gave him a delicate task to put my rudeness in a favourable light to her. But I know he would succeed.

He went on to say that it really would give him pleasure to make a short stay at the Manor Farm. He decided he would write a letter to John Wartley and see if it could be arranged. He was to leave the Reids yesterday, but proposes not to come here before

the middle of the month, as business demands his presence at this busy season.

"What kind of things is the Manor Farm to teach me?" he asked me quizzically.

I meant to give him a bantering reply, but instead came the words:

"Some of the differences between God and man."

"I should not wonder! You put things forcibly, Joan."

I smiled.

"Do you know the different tune the wind plays on the dead beech leaves that hang on the beech hedges even yet, from that it plays on the green summer leaves? Do you know the music of raindrops as they strike the surface of deep ponds? Do you know the Millet-like pictures made by the toilers in the fields? Do you know how companionable a robin may become so that it is to be reckoned as a factor in your day's pleasure? Have you learned the mystery men feel in their hearts for the moon, and the strange pity some have for lapwings?"

"No!" he said, "no one has taught me these things."

"And have you ever seen a morning rainbow in the *western* sky?"

He really considered this question.

"I have never seen a rainbow except in the east, now I come to think of it," he laughed.

"And I wonder," he said slowly, "if you will tell

me how you learned—as you never learned elsewhere —of this intermingling of joy and sorrow?"

I told him as well as I could some of the things I have told you, of Bob Ingleby, of the little Rachael, of the joy of the wheat-sowing, of my own gladness of heart, of little Mrs. Wartley's sweet cheeriness, and the sadness of the man who has left his farm.

XIV.

December, 7th.

I THINK companionship must have been the motive that made May Wartley answer my advertisement, and offer to receive me as a paying guest. They—the Wartleys—are proud folk, and when a second guest stood, as it were, begging at their gate, pride would out. They were not offended at Felix for asking ; they rather liked the idea of his coming, but pride, like Jack-in-a-Box, peeped forth. They had to pacify it, especially John Wartley himself. He did not boast of ancient pedigree, nor anything else objectionable, but I could see his pride was furnished with porcupine spines, and the spines were bristling. The elder Mrs. Wartley conquered hers first and made it apparent by remarking: "I like to make new friends and see new faces. Mr. Harridon's coming will give me something to think about for months after he has gone." May Wartley, having voluntarily opened the door to one stranger, did not like to shut it in the face of a second, when the second was a friend of the first.

It was decided he should be allowed to come, but

not for some hours after his letter had been received. I respected this hesitation, because I respect pride itself. I place it among the ancient and dignified qualities, less favoured now than formerly. It seemed to me fitting to meet it in this quiet peaceful house. The financial aspect of the matter did not greatly weigh with them, as is often the case with impecunious people, I have discovered.

"Funny fancy for a busy London publisher to choose a farm-house for a December holiday!" John Wartley remarked.

I did not want to give Felix' slackness away, so I agreed.

"Since the publisher has found that he is also author, he is author first and publisher afterwards. He will put us all into his next year's novel," I laughingly exclaimed—and we lightly discussed the man and his ways as an accompaniment to our meal.

As a rule I learn country things from John Wartley at meal times. He is not a great talker on general topics, not a great reader, and when I first came he was rather shy and silent. I quickly let him understand I longed to know the every-day facts of the country, that I was interested in the day's work, and conditions, in the ethics of farming, in the names of his fields, of his cart-horses, and his men, that I liked to know the key-note of each day, whether it were carting mangels, ploughing ollands or stubble, or threshing the corn. It relieved him to know I was eager to hear of the things he knew best. He has

proved immensely interesting. Now and then, May Wartley demurs that he will weary me, but the elder Mrs. Wartley nods and says: "No, no, she doesn't look wearied, you go on, John." The said John is grateful to her for understanding. There is a wonderful sympathy between this mother and son. And he proceeds to unfold the wonderful ways of men with the soil. This absorbing romance of *cultivated* Nature comes to town folk such as I as a delightful surprise. We seem to be under the impression that all the poetry and beauty lie in wild Nature until we learn these lovely secrets. You must humour the soil, it appears, by changing the crops. The shift, as they call it, consists of wheat, turnips, barley, hay, with oats or rye, or peas or beans as changes sometimes. And when these four crops have been grown, the fifth year sees the shift recommence. Men and masters alike go back on the shift for dates in an astounding way. Something was said the other day of some event of years ago. John Wartley thought the matter out.

"Eleven years ago," he said, "the Forty Acres was turnips that year, I remember."

We in London have nothing so delicious as a nature calendar like this. We might begin to hum and ha, and say, the year there were tulips in Hyde Park, and someone would remind us there are tulips there every year.

May Wartley spends a beautiful, I am tempted to write devotional, half hour after breakfast, before she

buckles down to her domestic duties. She is out in the garden, now she hovers over a patch of mossy Saxifrage. She knows its lifelong history, for she has reared it from seed as fine as dust. Again, she is stooping over Alpine Phloxes puckering her brows in anxiety lest they succumb to a sharp spell of frost after the long wet time. And there are spots she watches where as yet there is nothing above ground, only tallies to show she has treasure beneath. In her is a passion for flowers. She is tender, she is in melting mood of rich sweet happiness. May Wartley would not be the woman she is without the live influence of her flowers upon her. I rarely join her in this half hour. I think heart and soul within her mutely cry—leave me alone with them.

When she has returned to the house I sometimes make my own pilgrimage. I stoop over clumps of mossy Saxifrages, Aubrietias or Alpine Phloxes—she has taught me the names—but they do not mean to me what they mean to her. . . .

So far had I written my letter to you in the early morning, little dreaming what the day held in store for us. It saw human nature stretched on the rack for hours. Suspense, that crudest of all emotions, stalked through the day beside us. Every morning the daughter of the village schoolmaster comes here to teach Alec the rudiments. Yesterday, when she arrived, he was not forthcoming. His little world called him high and low—the wind carried the syllables 'Al-ec' far and wide like a beautiful echo. His

mother grew pale as marble ; the elder Mrs. Wartley would not allow herself to be anything but reassuring whatever she felt. I was amused, for I did not picture disaster. In old days you and I were often 'lost.' I could not believe that Alec was ripe yet for adventure. He has no heroes to emulate, and Red Indians are still acquaintances of the future. But of course I joined in the search. At the end of an hour, I found myself fully sharing the anxiety, and I despatched a boy to fetch home John Wartley from the fields. It seemed to me we had arrived at the pitch when we needed the masculine element to correct our feminine sense of proportion, to bluff, and tell us our fears and anxiety were foolish. Before John Wartley arrived, Bob Ingleby came upon the scene. He answered the purpose quite well.

"You leave him to me," he said to us three women. "I'll find him. What ! drowned ! Not a bit of it, don't you believe that ! "

He rode off down a wide farm tract.

An hour later between twenty and thirty men and boys were searching far and wide. The steam was up and the machinery had been well at work, but no more threshing was done. We three women went hither and thither. The dominant thought in my mind was, that he had climbed a tree. I felt it was foolish, but I went from one to another and gazed up into the bare branches. Over and over again I found myself repeating—'little boy lost, little boy lost,' as if it were the burden of a song.

At one o'clock John Wartley beckoned me aside.

"Keep May from coming this way. We are going to drag the horse-pond!"

His face was stern and set; it was the face of a man who faces malevolent fate. The tension was growing greater as time passed. He joined a group of nine or a dozen labourers. They went about the task with grave, capable faces, as if they knew what to do, and how to do it. There was a grimness about them all, young and old. There were no words wasted.

Suspense is like canker. Time seemed to stand still. A little later, I found one of the maids sobbing with her face in her arms on the kitchen table.

"There was a coffin in the bread the other day," she wailed hysterically, and added: "I cut up the loaf myself. I wanted some bread-crumbs for cooking, and seein' as I baked the batch myself, I never said nothin' to nobody. But sure and certain, the child is dead. It's a true sign, it be!"

"It is nothing of the sort," I declared, and she looked at me scornfully.

They dragged more than the one pond, and the light began to fail.

May came to my side.

"The gravel pits!" she whispered.

I knew she feared the little fellow had fallen headlong.

I went myself; there was no grim tragedy to disturb their eternal peace. A full moon was in the eastern sky, and in the west was the setting sun. I met Davy

Snow who is convalescent and sharp set with interest, and curiosity, and concern.

"Be the little 'un found, Miss?" he asked me.

"Not yet, Davy," I told him.

"I doubt then," he said, with terrible finality, "ye'll find but the corpse."

"Nonsense," I said sharply, "we must not let ourselves think that."

"Ah, ya!" he muttered, "but then thoughts don't come by lettin' and wishin'."

"We must hope for the best."

He shook his head.

"Ah, ya," he repeated, "we shall see if we live long enough."

We have lived long enough.

A waggon and a team of horses had been sent into Callowham—some ten or twelve miles—soon after breakfast. At the end of a couple of miles, Grey, the team man, had been startled to see Alec's face appearing from under the tarpaulin. His version was this:

The child announced that he had run away from his lesson books, and knowing he would not be back until late, the man had remarked: "They'll think ye are lost." Then he had suggested putting the child down and letting him run home.

Alec had objected.

"Shall I turn and give the horses four good miles or more extra journey then?" he had asked.

"No!" Alec said sturdily.

The slow-witted man let the child decide the matter. He took him into Callowham, shared the contents of his dinner-bag with him, dismissed the idea of the fright the child's long disappearance might cause, and brought him home in safety.

This was the anti-climax of all our anxiety and poignant distress of mind.

I watched a mother take a little sleepy boy from the team man's arms into her own. I saw the sturdy arms clasp about her neck, the little head sink upon her shoulder. The hours of agony were wiped out. I saw mourning turned to joy—pure, beautiful joy. Then John Wartley came to them, and his face was wondrously tender. He put his arm about her, and drew them both to him for a moment. They had passed through the Valley of the Shadows ; they had mounted to a hill-top of fervent gladness. Thank God for the ardent capacities of human nature. The day's emotions had been the big things of the day. Sometimes, when I have been writing, I have longed to witness such extreme emotion as this supreme joy. All supreme things are made up of great qualities—calmness, peace, silence, reverence, humility—their joy was just made of these.

"Well, you have him safe and sound!" was all John Wartley's lips said, but I fancy they were near to quivering.

Later, I went with the rejoicing mother to see this little-boy-found, asleep. Children, with their youngness and ignorance of evil, mould us to a marvellous

tenderness, Keith. May Wartley is not a beautiful woman, but last night she was beautiful.

She took me in her arms and kissed me. In most other circumstances, it would have been *I* who would have taken *her* to me, and kissed *her*. Do you understand the subtle thing that made us play each other's parts? I do. The little-boy-found was hers.

Bob Ingleby searched with us the day through, and all the time he opposed his courage and cheeriness to our fears and misgiving.

XV.

December, 12th.

Your birthday and mine. Twenty-eight years ago, I suppose, sympathetic friends were condoling with our parents, or ironically congratulating them—on the advent of twins. The oneness and the akinness between us are things the world in general does not understand, neither do they exist between all twins. But we know—and it helps us to realize a few deep, true things. I am glad I, and not Laura, have walked step by step with you. This magic of two minds interlinked would have delighted the man who wrote *Rab*. I read it last night, and shut the book as if it had been a Bible. I always do. Dr. John Brown would have understood.

I am reading your articles in the *Field* with sharp relish. John Wartley cannot afford to buy the *Field* for himself. He gloats over my copy, and I am delighted there is a *raison d'être* for my having it regularly.

Felix Harridon has arrived. For two days previously a couple of men were sedulously tidying. They attempted to cut the grass, but made a sorry business

of it in its wet condition. It looks crushed and dull instead of short and crisp. I noticed a new waterproof apron in John Wartley's dog-cart, and a new whip. He looked happy and complacent. His wife, when she saw them, fairly beamed. I wonder what it cost her in requesting them, waiting for them, fears lest they should not be forthcoming, and repeated reminders on several market days. Dilatory people get more than their due meed of thanks and gratitude, when the spirit does move them to performance.

The first thing Felix did when he came, was to sit down to a hearty country tea and enter upon a long discussion on the crying need for cottage-building in rural districts. Farmers feel the want of cottages badly, and, as John Wartley showed, at the present moment there are in the village seven condemned cottages uninhabited. Nine more are taken up by old widows living alone, and in receipt of old-age pensions. Most of them, before the time of these pensions, would have been taken into the workhouse.

May Wartley related a flagrant case of the futility of screaming—"Back to the Land"—while people already on it are forced into London to find house-room. A man and a maid were to have been married in Pelton a couple of months or so ago, after waiting a year or more for a cottage. Still there was none for them. The man, who was an excellent farm labourer, went to London to see what he could do. He found work. The maid joined him. They were married, and they will live, and probably rear children.

in a noisy slum of the great city. If they could have found a roof to cover them here, they would have spent their days in the fresh, wholesome country. An inferior man has had to take the place of the one who has gone. You can read a good deal between the lines in all this.

It does not pay to build cottages for the rent a farm labourer expects to pay. Higher wages are out of the question with the heavy burden which lies upon those who cultivate the soil.

From cottage-building the talk passed to the taking of small holdings from occupied farms. John Wartley showed eloquently the crippling effect this entails on men who have their capital invested in cattle, horses, implements and such things. Of course, Bob Ingleby's case was threshed out. Felix became intensely interested. He certainly had never seen these matters from the point of view of the "men on the spot." A little later Bob himself dropped in, and we women-kind left them still enlightening Felix. I learned a good deal. Also, I was rejoiced that they had discussed these vital matters before us, and had not left them until we had departed—as generally is the case.

I must tell you what Bob Ingleby dropped in to tell us: that Tom Priestly, one of his labourers, has been arrested for poaching.

"A man who looks honest and walks like a soldier!" I asked.

"That describes him; he is a good example of

what the old militia did for the working man in the way of making him walk with his head up."

"It is not the first time he has been caught. I daresay it won't be the last," John Wartley remarked.

"It's bred in the bone," the elder Mrs. Wartley said.

"If ever there was a man full of true sporting spirit, that man is Tom Priestly. The spirit of sport in a man is not confined to any class. I have seen him act as beater many a time, and longed to put a gun into his hand. He is a sportsman before he is anything else. Such men you may fine, or send to prison, *and* pity from the bottom of your soul, at one and the same time." Bob spoke vehemently.

Felix stroked his moustache.

"A man who lacked the spirit of the sportsman might well envy this Tom Priestly the possession of this old passion—old as the race is old!"

"You bet he might!" Bob allowed.

He turned to me.

"You said he 'looked honest,' just now. He is honest, in all else than this. I know him well. I know the poor wretch is in hell sometimes with this overmastering passion. I want you all to realize how desperately he has wrestled with himself, or the Devil, or whichever it is, to keep out of this. Sometimes he has unburdened his soul to me. With him it is not a case of poaching for greed or gain as it is with most poachers."

"My sympathy goes out to this breaker of the law," I said.

"I wonder," Bob said quietly, "if you would go and tell his wife that. She might listen to a stranger."

"Wouldn't it be going out of my way to display my folly?" I said.

"In this case we all share your folly," Bob said quickly.

"Yes! seeing that Bob lets his shooting, and my landlord retains mine in his own hands," John Wartley added slyly—and we all laughed.

"It would be just the same if I were the sufferer," Bob maintained. "And it does not make any difference to the fact that Priestly has a wife filled with a devouring bitterness, and possessed of an abusive tongue.

"Will you go, Joan? It would be doing Samaritan's business to soften its edge."

I promised, and noticed that Felix looked surprised to hear me called by my Christian name.

As we stood together bidding each other goodnight, the elder Mrs. Wartley put her hand upon my shoulder, and looked at Felix.

"This child is doing us a world of good," she said. "She laughs on both sides of her mouth."

"She was always known as the manufacturer of halos," Felix told her.

The little lady divined his meaning.

"There are more things worth halos in this world than is generally supposed."

"Of course there are, but only the plucky ones find it out, Mrs. Wartley."

"Only the plucky ones," she echoed slowly, meditated, and replied, "Yes! that is true."

"Laughter is the gift of the gods!" Felix said smiling.

"To serve life with its proper sauces is a weighty matter!" the little lady hazarded. She revels in this figurative type of conversation, and swears by George Eliot.

Next day I went to interview Mrs. Tom Priestly, and Felix walked the mile and a half with me, and waited for me in the road.

She did not come to the door to let me in, but screamed from a remote interior:

"Come in, there, unless you be the baker. If you be, I ain't wantin' no bread."

Not being the distributor of loaves, I entered. She sat over the fire weeping, with the last baby in her arms, and three other children looking disconsolate, and ravenously hungry, standing about the table.

She greeted me with:

"I ha' got a bad husband, Miss. Tom's locked up, and I shall be on the parish agin. He earn good money. He h'aint no call to go stealin' game!"

She knew not that call which runs as molten lead through a man's blood. Few women know it, and fewer still can make allowance for it.

"I'd leave him if it wasn't for the children. I ha' lost my respect for him, and all the love I ever had for the likes o' him!"

She was overwrought and violent in her long-nursed anger and shame.

"I hope even a liking for poaching would not make me cease to love my husband—there are worse faults than that!" I said.

She turned about and stared at me.

"I was brought up by respectable parents!" she vociferated.

"And so was I!" I told her.

"My poor father used to preach i' the chapel. He would turn in his grave, he would, if he knew what I had come to!"

"My father was a general and a stern disciplinarian," I rejoined.

She had yet more of which to unburden herself in this same vehement manner.

"I'd speak agin' Tom afore the magistrates with pleasure, and let 'em know he is liklies to die at the rope's end yet."

I had watched meanwhile a small boy's face as she hurled forth her wrath. The child was suffering agonies of apprehension on his father's behalf. I hope I was able to ease that little heart of its fears. I tried my best.

The woman gazed at the boy in my arms.

"He ha' got a rare example afore him. I hope he'll learn not to tread in his father's footsteps. He's the very image o' his father. Yer don't want to die on the gallows do yer, Tom?"

"No!" Tom muttered stolidly.

"You be a good boy then, else you will. Aye that you will!"

I came away with a sense of defeat and failure. I pity Tom Priestly now. I shall pity him more when he returns home, and has to live down his offence with that woman. Our attitude to others and theirs to us when we have been convicted of a fault is curiously illuminative of character. The culprit has a difficult part to play so long as the remembrance of his fault renders him self-conscious.

When I reached the road again, I found Felix smoking on a stile.

"Ingleby has just ridden by," he announced. "By the way, he is a mighty fine horseman. The mare he rode was almost on fire with spirit!"

It was good to hear this praise of Bob, and I hastened to add:

"There is not supposed to be a man in the county to touch him for horsemanship. In the point to point races he is splendid."

"I can believe that."

Then he changed the subject and asked:

"Have you successfully soothed a wife's outraged feelings?"

I related my experiences as amusingly as I could. I was not considerate of my sex, and did not let the virago down gently.

"Yes!" he said meditatively. "But wouldn't a poaching husband make you bitter?"

"There are poachers and poachers. I would try

to understand my poacher, and find out to which class he belonged, and judge him accordingly."

"You do not expect Mrs. Tom Priestly to be as logical as you are yourself, Joan?" he asked, quietly amused.

"I don't expect you to excuse a woman's vituperative tongue."

"I suppose not, neither am I doing so. I thought to uphold the theory of cause and effect. It is the one who is struck who feels the pain; the onlooker who is not hurt can judge more leniently than the one who is."

"From whence comes impartial judgment?" I asked.

"From him who hears the story from both sides, and then weighs it in the balance."

"I suppose you are thinking of judge and jury and therefore rating women out of the reckoning. What a feather it would have been in the feminine cap if those two sorely distraught mothers had appealed to a third mother instead of to Solomon, who could not possibly understand their feelings!"

"I can see you mean to have the last word!"

We had walked quickly up a fairly steep hill. Suddenly Felix stopped painfully out of breath. He looked ghastly.

"I must be getting old with a vengeance!" he panted.

This breathlessness is part of the mischief that took him to a specialist you may be sure, Keith.

"It's nothing," he protested. "You spoke of point to point races ; have you never seen a horse go till he drops, and lie till he gets his wind again ? "

"I never saw a point to point race, but I hate seeing you like this. Now don't talk. I'll do that," I said.

We walked slower and by the time we reached the Manor Farm he was himself again. I do not like these distressing symptoms. I want to know what they mean. Felix is the great successful London publisher, on the one hand, and glories in his work. On the other, he is a lonely solitary soul without kith and kin in the world. He ought to have married Laura. He wants a domesticated woman to fuss over him. Like many lonely mortals, his rôle would seem to be to look after the weaker mortals that come in his way. He gives, but he does not take.

P.S.—I fastened up this letter last evening, but it is worth opening it again to tell you that this morning, Susanna, the maid I had discovered sobbing on the kitchen table, approached me with a look of distinct triumph on her face.

"If you please, Miss, I hev had a letter from mother this morning, to tell me as how grandfather died yesterday forenoon."

"I am truly sorry, Susanna ! " I said, puzzling how to reconcile the chastening news with Susanna's triumphant expression.

"I knew I was right, Miss. I knew that corffin in the loaf wasn't there for nought—they never is. Sure,

Miss, ter be a true sign o' comin' death—and I'll ever believe it ! "

What could I say when a grandfather had thus opportunely died to prove the truth of her words?

" 'Liza Snow had a corffin in the last batch as she ever med. She showed it to her neighbour, and hoped it didn't betide no ill to Davy. It war her own death, Miss, in the bread, med and baked wie her own hands, poor soul."

Susanna felt she was getting the better of me and my unbelief—and exulted.

I could not refute the facts she had quoted, therefore felt it was policy to abstain from scoffing.

I said :

" Coincidences are sometimes curious things ! "

" Not if you takes 'em as signs and warnings, Miss ! " she maintained—and retired, still triumphant.

XVI.

December, 16th.

Mrs. Cameron is an entertaining woman. And an entertaining woman can carry off misfortunes that would tend to make others, who are duller, obnoxious. For instance, she has chilblains, red and raw, in winter, and hay-fever in summer, and between whiles, asthma, and at all times, irresistible energy.

Yesterday, I spent hours in her service, grudgingly and of necessity, because I did not know how to refuse. She arrived soon after breakfast, with her chilblains, her energy, and a string satchel swollen with literature, in the form of political leaflets. They were for the enlightenment of Pelton generally, which by the way, is morosely and cantankerously radical. I need scarcely say the literature emanated from the other side.

My distribution of it had come as an inspiration. My ignorance of everyone's creeds and politics constituted me the ideal distributor. She almost implied I had been providentially brought to Pelton for the purpose. She evidently congratulated herself on shifting a distasteful duty to other shoulders, but even

more in outwitting the natives in some mysterious way. She chuckled with self-satisfaction.

"You don't mind—you are sure you don't mind? It will be a pleasant morning's work in a good cause. Just give the leaflets into the hands of those who answer your knocks with a pleasant word. The satchel won't long remain as heavy as it is now."

By this time she had persuaded herself that any sense of obligation should be mine. I grimaced inwardly, and accepted the task as graciously as I could.

I might not even invite Felix' help and companionship, for he also was doing 'a good morning's work.' If she could have pictured a second helper equally ignorant of the individual opinions of the different cottagers, she would have chuckled with yet keener enjoyment, and looked upon it as so much the better joke. To this extent I was glad to disappoint her.

She was at the window as I passed, and waved courage and encouragement to me.

I left my leaflets at every cottage, but at each one I was careful to say: "I am going round with these for Mrs. Cameron!"

I felt I owed myself so much. Whenever this information elicited "Humph!" I put the breather of it down as an utter rabid radical.

John Wartley laughed heartily when he heard how I had spent my morning.

It happened that Mrs. Cameron's visit had been preceded by one from Bob Ingleby. He too had had

an inspiration. It had to do with Tom Priestly. We were all at breakfast when he came in, therefore we all heard his mission.

He turned to Felix with that ingratiating smile of his, and told him he was relying on his help.

"I want you to go over and put the facts just as they are to Sir Samuel Reid, because you are a personal friend of his, and persuade him to take on Tom as a keeper. He is quite capable," he explained, as he peeled himself an apple.

"You believe in that well-worn experiment of turning an incorrigible poacher into a keeper?" Felix queried quietly.

"It often succeeds. It is better for Sammy Reid to pay Tom to preserve his pheasants than to let him poach them. Mind you, I know my man. I would not counsel the experiment with all and sundry!" Bob said this with his old boyish decision and finality.

In the end it was decided that both should go. Bob would drive Felix over, and between them they would do what they could for Tom.

Before he started, Felix asked me once more if I would not like Lady Sybil Reid to call upon me.

Again I said "No," for the same reason as before.

Since he first asked me the question, I have seen Lady Sybil. Margaret Derston drove me to a meet at the beech wood cross ways one day last week. She pointed out the best mounted woman there, and told

me it was she. She has, I think, the most beautiful face I have ever seen. I do not wonder Felix admires her, and values her friendship, as I suppose he does.

Margaret went on to explain how Pelton loses by having no resident squire, and Walton gains.

"She is the good angel there," she said.

I was curious enough to ask:

"Does she live happily with her husband?"

"He leaves her a good deal, I believe. But she is a woman of high courage. Gossip says they are not over-well suited to each other."

I recalled Felix' words, and told Margaret I had heard her described as "A woman of the world, with a big heart, and enough brain to take the ups and downs of life philosophically."

"That sounds like the opinion of one who knows her well!" was Margaret's comment.

Bob and Felix have returned. I ran downstairs to hear the result of their mission. Its issue is successful. Sir Samuel Reid is sportsman enough to take on Tom Priestly as an under keeper. There and then my opinion of him rose many degrees.

"Why, he is one of the best fellows in creation!" Felix said heartily.

Tom came before the Bench this morning. He has escaped with a fine. He is home, and Bob and Felix have interviewed him.

When he heard the news he burst into sobs and called down all the blessings of heaven on Bob's head.

"You should have seen what I saw!" Felix said whimsically. "That giant of a fellow blubbering like a baby, then suddenly seizing Ingleby's hand and stammering:

"'You shan't never repent of what you have done, Master Bob.'"

"As if I didn't know that," Bob muttered, and added, "but I am glad he said it."

Alec and Sonny and I have been doing the honours of the place. We piloted Felix to the granary by the quaint outside stairs, to get the mingled smell of barley-meal, and linseed cake, and oats. He sniffed it luxuriantly and cried: "How good it is, and I am to carry it in grateful remembrance all my days, eh Joan?"

"All your days!" I told him.

We led him to the barn where a couple of men were dressing wheat—one of them shovelling it up on the boarded floor into a great shelving golden heap.

"Gettin' on for five bushels to the coomb, barley runs de year, and that's bad," the barn man informed Felix, pointing to a number of sacks filled ready for delivery.

Felix commiserated, as if he understood the matter, which I am sure he did not.

"Barley be sold by weight hereabouts, you understand, Sir, and it's thin and light de year—and ter take over four bushels to the sack—bad, Sir—werry bad."

Finally, the barn man weighed us all on the machine

he weighs his barley on—weighed us with great lumbering four stone weights below, and handy small ones on the upper board.

"Nine stone four, you weighs, Miss!" he announced, having brought things to a nicety with much deliberation; "jest the weight, exact to an ounce, my wife weighed when I married her ten years ago."

"Barley be light, Sir, as I telled yer, but there be a fair good quantity, so there be some compensation." He seemed relieved now that he had put the matter squarely, and proceeded to weigh Felix with the same grave attention.

"What's this?" Felix asked, as he buried his hand in a great mass of silvery light stuff.

"That, Sir—that's flight—oat chaff, as yer may say. Master lets us hev it home by the sackful, and them as h'aint feather beds, makes their beds o' that—good beds too."

"And does it always keep the good straw and grain smell it has now?" I asked.

"Ter don't never lose it, Miss."

Ah, Keith dear, think of the healthiness and wholesomeness of a fragrant bed like that. Why, in London, they would sleep on shoddy.

From thence we took Felix into the carpenter's shop, and here he sniffed joyfully the sweet scent of a floor covered with freshly-planed, curly shavings of pine wood.

"I don't believe you knew you possessed so keen

enjoyment in your nose," I laughed. "That's one of the things I wanted you to learn."

"You didn't know smells was so good," Alec said, hopping about Felix delightedly.

"That I never did!" he affirmed emphatically, and Alec suggested, "Let us take him to see the pigs!"

Even Sonny joined in the laughter, though without understanding why.

"This does not compare with the ordinary country house visit, does it, Felix?" I said jubilantly. "It is all much more real and at the heart of things than those Sunday afternoon visits to model stables and kennels on a model home farm."

"Look here!" Felix stopped, and so did the rest of us. "Look here! if you don't set yourself to write that book, with all this for background and setting, then I shall. But, Joan, I should love to have it from your pen. I want it all seen through a woman's eyes. You understand what I mean. Bring out the poetry and the real beauty of the commonplace trifles and happenings as they come and go—as the old Dutch interiors did. I'll see to the rest—it shall be for the delight of many. You are living it all and loving it all."

"When you talk like that I get a *post impressional* picture of windmills, and horses ploughing, and fields of cabbages with untellable purple tones on them, and men in fustian topping and tailing mangels—that's the correct term, Felix—and granaries, and . . . and

pigstyes. It would be hopeless to tackle such confused visions."

"Try, Joan!"

"The bolder, racier masculine pen is more suitable to the subject."

"I want the woman's vision of it."

"Skim milk!" I sneered flippantly.

"The cream," he laughed.

"We shall quarrel, Felix."

"Never mind if I get the best of it."

I did not betray my secret. Let me whisper. The book grows apace, Keith.

Is it hard for you under your orient sunshine to picture our cold greyness? We came this afternoon along a low hedgerow dividing long, wide fields. There was no foliage, no colour, except long stalks of dead, dun-coloured grass, and dried seed vessels of yarrow and knotweed. We made our way across a field of bare winter stubble meekly waiting for the plough. There it is—low dividing hedgerows and bare fields, and a gathering storm-cloud across the uplands above us. It was not without its poetry—grey winter, still and silent as a picture, almost as lifeless seemingly, as a picture—austere, too close for any particular sense of atmosphere and as reticent in its colour scheme as a painting by Eugène Carrière.

And once we came upon a little heap of feathers, a tiny morsel of skull to which the beaks were attached —it was all that was left of a hawk's meal—and the feathers were the feathers of a song thrush. There

is a curious sense of fitness and congruity within me during these days—for I am reading Henri Amiel's Journal. His was the seeing eye and the brooding mind. How I should have liked to thrust strenuous responsibility—a wife and a large family—on that man. It would have strengthened his nerve and his outlook—but I doubt if he would have been happier.

XVII.

December, 20th.

I AM writing my mail letter earlier than I need because I do not want it to break into the Christmas week. I so cherish the Christmas-tide. I feel so tender towards it, and impressed, that I want to give it you collectively, when I shall see it whole, and lovely, and fulfilled.

I think to give myself the pleasure of bestowing a few Christmas-tide gifts, so with this in mind, when I met the little Rachel this morning, I said:

"Tell me what you would ask Father Christmas to give you if you met him carrying a sackful of presents!"

The grave little thing broke into a ripple of laughter.

"I know!" she whispered presently, and put her hand into mine.

"Tell me?"

"A little needlebook with a bit o' scalloped flannel in it, and a bunch o' willets on the cover, like my cousin Alice hev."

"Wouldn't you rather have a doll? Father Christmas has lots of dolls."

"I hev got two nice little dolls!"

"Have you thought of a big picture-book?" I asked.

I could not tempt her. The needlebook held her enthralled.

"I'll tell Father Christmas. He's a dear, obliging old soul."

"Will you tell him about the bit o' scalloped flannel, Miss?"

"The flannel shall be there right enough!" I assured her, as at the cross roads our ways parted.

I can't tell you the heartache the little one's modest longing gave me. If it be, as her mother fears, her last Christmas—and she wants only a little needlebook with a bunch of violets on the cover, and a bit of scalloped flannel inside—what a blessed thing it is that I can satisfy her biggest wish!

I have bought a smart pair of gaiters for old Davy. After studying the gaiters of every man I met, I had the temerity to go into a shop and choose a man's gaiters for him. It was anxious work. But I will not burden you with a further list.

Felix Harridon fits into the life, and place, and mood here, as I knew he would. He is not restless as some men are, when away from their usual occupation, with nothing particular to take its place. He is the good comrade he always has been. He sits tight and lets the character of the place and people saturate his being. He shares the position of onlooker with me. He fraternises with John Wartley.

and Bob, and Basil Cameron. Often, he goes the Doctor's rounds with him.

I wonder if he has consulted the doctor professionally. I have *mentally* paid a friendly visit to Basil Cameron since Felix fails to confide in an old friend. I have, you understand, only been in the spirit. My visit passed off after this wise.

"I want to know if Mr. Harridon's life is in danger. He is friend, guide, and counsellor to Keith and me, and we cannot let him slip through our fingers."

Basil Cameron looked kind and indulgent.

"I hope he will soon be as fit as he ever was. The chances are he will."

"But the off-chance?" I questioned.

"The off-chance is against most of us, Miss Cantley!"

And so on—the Doctor helpless under his medical etiquette and I trying to strike between the joints.

I continue:

"I know it is execrable taste on my part, but Felix Harridon has none to worry over him if Keith and I do not."

"It is the kindest and friendliest thing you could have done. I do not misunderstand in the slightest."

"May I ask you a few questions?"

He intimated that I might.

"Have you sounded him?"

"I have."

"Is his heart wrong?"

"That is the seat of the trouble, but there is no cause for you to be alarmed."

I might have plied a hundred questions, but I should have arrived at nothing—thanks to medical etiquette—so arriving at this stage in anticipation, I knew I was contemplating a quite impossible thing, and have abandoned the idea. What a fool I was ever to have contemplated such a visit! How wise only to have paid it mentally.

I wonder if Felix has confided in Sybil Reid!

As we, Felix and I, rode over the Heath this afternoon—(Bob Ingleby lends him a charming grey mare)—I was reminded of my last ride there, when Margaret Derston was my companion. I told him what I thought was the beautiful undercurrent in the lives of Basil Cameron and Margaret Derston.

"I would rather he had not told her!" Felix commented.

"Perhaps he never has."

"Ah," he said, "words are not everything, are they, Joan!" and he laughed blithely.

He was still laughing when he added:

"I have a friend who longs to tell a woman he loves her, but the insurmountable barrier he sees between them, keeps him silent."

"Of course she is far happier to remain in ignorance," I said lightly, and because I knew the opposite was the truth.

"Over and above the barrier there is the prospect of her making a far more brilliant and desirable match."

"Are your friend and the woman he loves very young?" I asked.

"Mere children, not in years perhaps, but in heart. They have merry hearts that go all the way. They are ship-mates with half the world—if you understand what I mean—and they are modern philosophers—modern philosophers do not brood over spilt milk. If they have a thing to do, they do it—as Lord Chesterfield neatly puts it—'to minuet time.'"

"They evidently behave like good Arcadians," I said.

"Yes! they play the game. Now—a good canter home, Joan!"

The horses loved it as much as we did. I believe it was rather too much for Felix, he looked ghastly white, but smiling, and I felt he could not have done it a week ago.

"Didn't I tell you you would find tonic and pick-me-up?" I asked.

"I thought you said soothing syrup and sedative, my lady!"

I had not time to reply before Alec and Sonny tumbled together through the door and forcibly seized me.

"My Miss Cantley, I'se some news for 'ou!" panted Sonny in a desperate effort to be first.

"There's a big box from India that came on Grey's waggon from the station. I think it wants to be opened as fast as it can. I can't lift it, and it took all

Grey's strength, he said. And it is just inside the back door."

Nothing superficial about Alec you see. So far as he knew anything of that wonder-box I had the information in a nut-shell.

We proceeded to the opening ceremony, Felix and I, all the Wartley family, and now and then, a peeping maid servant. Amid breathless onlooking, John Wartley set to with hammer and screw-driver. He deliberately raised the screws, and where there were nails raised and extracted them.

"Daddy loves '*wire*' nails," Alec commented, as he fondly collected them.

The lid was off, the packing cleared away and to our wondering gaze was exposed—serene, placid, dignified, that silent Indian god, inscrutable as the Sphinx—wise, wide-eyed, smiling. I cannot tell you why, but my heart thrilled with joy at the thought of possessing it. I wonder if you guessed it would be like that. But when it came to discovering an exquisite bit of Indian work for May Wartley, a delicious shawl for the elder Mrs. Wartley, the tobacco-box for John Wartley, the elephant for Alec, and the tiger for Sonny, I could have whistled for joy. The place echoed with ripples of pleasure and merriment. Do you know what it is when little children cannot stand still for gladness and excitement, and anon throw themselves on you for hugs? Keith dear, how did you come to plan this surprise? Some men create more happiness than duty demands. Surprise

joy is effervescent, heady, glorious. I love it. I am grateful from head to foot.

It is years since I spent a Christmas with children about me. To spend a young Christmas is a glorious, rejuvenating thing. Felix is finding this out also, I feel sure. He is so, if I write *hearty*, I mean a deal that does not express, if I write *jovial* you must take it in its big meaning of "under the influence of Jupiter." Alec and Sonny adore him, and when I say that, I show you more especially what I cannot express in adjectives.

Your box arrived at a fit moment. We were waiting for something to set us humming to the tune of Christmas glee, and that box has accomplished it. I have started my Christmas-tide. My whole being is festive.

"O winds! O birds! O rushing streams and seas!
And all things that make music for a space."

XVIII.

December, 22nd.

After all, I am forced to break into my Christmas week with a letter. It is not a seasonable one, only a news letter that might have belonged to any time. Until yesterday, Ruby and I had not accomplished that prearranged pilgrimage to Carminster. We had agreed to postpone it until after Christmas. Mrs. Cameron prevailed upon Ruby, however, to undertake a commission or two for her. And Ruby begged me to accompany her. It is a soul-satisfying thing to Mrs. Cameron to arrange a day's work for two people. It causes her great elation of mind.

It was Market Day, sunny, cold, and dry. There was a spirit of alertness and vigour abroad, as if the hoary old city cried: "I can see, I can hear, I enjoy good health, I have much for which to be thankful." And when you fancy an old town saying that, you can forgive it, if sometimes it be dull and sleepy. I would have every town express its moods.

Ruby's eyes sparkled, her face glowed as we reached the shops.

"I love a town!" she breathed softly.

She might with truth have added: "I hate a country village!"

She was piquant and bewitching in this congenial atmosphere. She proved an excellent cicerone, and I began to feel I could love this old city where Nature has reclaimed so much, or rather has set her seal on man's work. From the hill above it, we looked down on the pen-covered Market in its sunny whiteness of paint and whitewash. There was hustle and bustle, men and cattle, lowing of oxen, squealing of pigs, laughter, and, so far as we could see, much good nature. Drovers had holly or mistletoe in their hats, and shouted lustily.

We missed our train, and in the hour and a half's delay we found time to distance the city a little. The sun sank in a clear, chrome and green sky; and under the sunset, misty purple reached out and caught the city in its still, soft atmosphere—till it stood like some dream vision.

You do not rhapsodize to the Ruby Camerons of this world, especially when they hint there is yet time for hot scones and coffee. We were settled comfortably beside our steaming cups when Mr. Marshall appeared on the scene. An unfamiliar form accompanied him. It scarcely needed the elder man's beaming good humour to know that the stranger was the expected son from India—of course it was—very brown, very broad, and very comely. He smiles readily, and his laugh rings true. He was introduced, and quickly more scones and more coffee appeared.

After that we travelled home together. For some reason Captain Marshall had come the day before he was expected.

He confesses he is not much of a Polo player, but he related for my benefit some notable achievements of a certain Keith Cantley. Ruby attracted him powerfully. Seeing this, I dragged in the words 'your fiancé' into some trivial remark I addressed to her. I was not going to have this man who had weathered the attractions of India caught by the first pretty face he met in England, and declare it was love at first sight. Sometimes this happens—we have known these cases, mon cher, hav'n't we?

The Vicar loves to hear his own stories as told by himself. As it happened, he had one that amused us greatly. It seems he has tried to induce a certain Mrs. Jolibund to become a more frequent church goer. The woman had no valid excuse ready to offer, and she saved the situation by answering heartily:

"Well, Sir, look 'er here, if in any ways my comin' to church would oblige the Lord—or you, why Sir, I'll come."

"Oh," Ruby nodded, "that is the nice thing about the cottage women. They are always ready to 'oblige.' You know Martha Heskin's mother, Joan. She is one of Basil's patients, and, as she would put it, has a high respect for him. Her respect is for what he can do for others; she is no believer in medicine for herself. Last year she really was seriously ill, and Basil told her he insisted on her taking

the medicine he sent. For all that he had his doubts, and he asked Margaret Derston to find out if she took it or not.

"Margaret interviewed her, and felt round the subject, and at last asked the question outright.

"The old lady confessed, Margaret declared, with a wink, a smile, and a confidential nod or two:—

"'I don't take kindly to medicine, Miss, nor yet to disobliging of the doctor.' She leaned over her chair and whispered: 'I adulterates it with water, till there is scarce no taste left, and it don't make no difference neither ways—for good nor for bad!'"

"That is less alarming than the ways of Joshua Noll!" Mr. Marshall declared. He always caps a story when he can.

It appears Joshua Noll was alarmingly ill for a day or two, but recovered rapidly. In addition to the Doctor's medicine he had procured some from the chemist.

"I takes a dose out o' one bottle, and next time a dose out of the t'other. And I never threw off my trouble so quickly!" he is alleged to have boasted.

The Vicar was beginning another story when we reached our destination.

John Wartley was there to meet me in the dog-cart, and we gave Ruby a lift to the "White House." I smiled as I noticed the very friendly handshake between "Richard and Ruby." Does that comely stranger think to give us the comedy of watching a pleasant little flirtation? If so, I see Bob Ingleby

demanding the reason why, very fiercely and very insistently. I wonder if this handsome Anglo-Indian thinks himself irresistible ! I suppose if he carries on a mild flirtation, I shall, as onlooker, enjoy the fun. But they must not burn their wings. I shall be on the look-out and give due warning if I smell the least odour of scorching. I am delighted my letters amuse you, and that I may continue in the same strain.

XIX.

December, 26th.

It is over, this gladsome Christmas-tide. It is the Christmas of all others I shall lay by for the green memory of old age. It has been simple, and heart-stirring, and lovable—a thing apart. There is little to write of those few days, but much to feel—which happens often with golden days.

On Tuesday we were most of the daylight in the church, surrounded by holly, and moss, and evergreens. Even old Mrs. Wartley was driven down to decorate that portion she has failed but once to do in forty-five years.

"'Twas the year my third boy was born," she tells me. "He was only a week old, and those who did my work for me made a great mess, standing on the berries; the old clerk devoutly hoped—'Mrs. Wartley would have no more babies at the Christmas-tide'—I never had, my dear!" she ended gleefully.

For days she has been weaving and making the daintiest of wreaths, such as none of us younger ones can achieve, and for hours Felix was her helper in getting them fixed into place. At some other time

I shall have to tell you of the delicious friendship that has sprung up between these two. It is one of the prettiest friendships I have ever watched.

Ruby came in for a good deal of help from Richard Marshall. Once, Basil Cameron came striding in for a few moments, to bring what he declared to be the finest bit of holly he had seen. His quick eye took us all in, and he bore it in triumph to Margaret Derston.

Early in the morning Davy Snow had brought me a grand holly bough.

"I thought when I see'd hulver, berried as this be, as it would plaise yer, Miss. It's a rare, bright hulver bough, b'aint it? And sakes alive, Miss, them gaiters is good 'uns, best iver I clapped on to my legs. I thanks you kindly, and may God Almighty bless yer. I wishes yer a rare, Merry Christmas and many on 'em."

I am glad he never wore better gaiters.

And then, at the dead of night came the waits—their one and only round of the season—and roused us from sleep-land with:

> "While shepherds watched their flocks by night
> All seated on the ground,
> The Angels of the Lord came down
> And glory shone around."

The sensation of being deeply and quietly impressed is a strange, beautiful thing to recall. Outside, the wind, the voices, the music of an old violin, around me the darkness—there crept over me a sense

of benediction. I listened to "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," and "The Mistletoe Bough." Then —they were so close under my open window—I heard shuffling feet, someone swinging his arms across his chest to warm his hands, and a gruff "Now, altogether, lads, when I ses three ; one, two, *three*. At that came a lusty shout: "A merry, merry Christmas to you all."

And many feet went tramping down the gravel pathway. As they went, there came the far-off sound of the church clock striking two. It was Christmas morning.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Marshall attempted to hide their happiness at having their stranger home. *His* eyes would wander to the tall figure in the Vicarage pew, and *she* stole many sidelong glances, with her lips breaking to a smile each time.

Joan is an inattentive worshipper—you will think —only between whiles. I never entered more into any service in my life. There was hearty singing. But if you detach yourself, the massive walls in their plain whitewash, the great silent columns, the grand arches share your silence with you, as you listen to the sound ascending to Him who was the Babe at Bethlehem.

If you have never seen Felix play with children—and I doubt if you have—let me tell you he is a champion at the task. We played until we were breathless, and the dear old Granny joined with the prettiest

gusto in the game of "Turning the Trencher." It requires such alacrity, and alertness, such nimbleness, and she proved the cleverest of us all. Just to tell the names of the games we played enthralls me—"Tom Tidler's Ground," and "Puss in the Corner," "Musical Chairs," "Honeypots," "Old Soldier," and "Post." Do you remember a dear old panelled nursery, and three small children, and a girlish mother there—I felt I should begin on the old memories if I wrote the names of the familiar games. There are things that go straight to the heart and stir its buried treasure.

Once, Alec clambering on Felix' knees, with his hands round his neck, and looking down into his face, remarked gravely:

"You play with your little boys like this, I suppose?"

"It is how I would play with them!" Felix laughed.

And Alec, a little puzzled, left it at that.

We played a bit longer, but suddenly Felix grew ghastly white—and, he just didn't faint, and quickly recovered.

He made light of it, as he always does, poor lonely old Felix—I ought to have been more thoughtful—but he is so infectiously gay, and debonnair, one forgets—and then is overcome with remorse.

All the day the wind rose steadily, and now it had reached the velocity of a gale. It was blowing big guns. But I had a mission. I stole away out of the

house with a big box I had left over from a cargo of Tom Smith's crackers. I meant the little Rachel to have them, and I meant to pull the first one with her myself. I was driven by the wind, and made to go the pace it chose to send me, until at last I found myself at the edge of a pond. The water lapped in tremulous wavelets over the whole surface, under the wind's tyranny. The banks were high above the water and sheer like miniature precipices. I was almost lifted off my feet, as the wind came like a great creature behind me, and hurled itself upon me. I might not go a step forward with safety. If the wind . . . it came. I went from heel to toe. It was splendid—human strength—my puny strength challenging the wild untamed wind. We laughed and wrestled together—the wind and I. Stand firm . . . and the wind shouted—"if you can." Once . . . but I righted myself, and then, because the wind was so nearly master, I retreated, or rather I left the pond and hastened to the cottage. Father Christmas' Needlebook was brought out for my inspection. Then we set-to on the crackers. Half fearful of the noise, but wholly delighting, the child was a picture of merriment, and Martha herself radiated gratitude.

I had a joy yet in store, a greedy, selfish one for my own delectation. Hitherto, I had sped before the wind. I longed to go back in its teeth and meet it fair and square. And this I did. I was alone in the dimness with it, and to be alone with the stupendous, elemental thing in its wild fury is to learn that

which you cannot tell. It has come from the remote past; it will go forward to a misty future. Perhaps, it will out-live human life. What the roar of the waves is to the great sea, that is the wind to the land. It bears on its wings the spirit of the lonely north, the wild solitude of the waste of waters over which it has passed. I can fancy a world with seas that break on lonely shores, and great tracts of wild lands, and nothing else; no life, but only the wind upon them.

Martha begged me to let her boy, Bill, a slouching lad of two or three and twenty, accompany me back, and if I had acceded I should have lost all my joy in it.

When at last I arrived, and we were seated at tea—with more crackers be it said, for there was no nursery tea on this occasion—I told them of my wind adventure.

"I ought to have been with you!" Felix laughed. He turned to May Wartley.

"We have shared adventures before, Mrs. Wartley. It is an enviable thing to share one with her. She loves it so."

Granny Wartley—(I can't think why it never struck me to write of her so, until to-day)—opened her lips to say something, but a quick second thought made her leave it unsaid. I am still inventing sentences she might have uttered.

May Wartley said: "Adventurous spirits enjoy the gaieties of earth, air, and water, and timid ones fear to catch at them."

She counts herself among the timid contingent. I do not agree with her there. I should rather say her nature is naturally a serious one, and the serious-minded ones look before they leap—the adventure-seekers leap before they look—and just as well sometimes.

Later, the wind slacked. How you notice things like this at the Manor Farm ! A white moon shone in a silvery sky. There are not many nights that give us *silvery* skies, and Felix called me out to see it.

"Watchman, what of the night?" I asked lightly as I joined him.

"A white night with a wonderful etched landscape," he replied, and added, "Wartley says the land badly needs some frosts. It has been water-logged for weeks."

"Frosts are Nature's sharp discipline!" I laughed.

"Ah ! discipline," he repeated.

And through the white night came the fitful call of a brown owl, repeated again and again, and presently an answering cry from one of the moor fowl that haunt the bit of old moat beyond the garden. The night birds' cries delight me.

"Is the brown owl a bird of good omen?" Felix asked softly.

"Good omen or no, he is a mischievous bird. Night after night I hear him, and he is rarely satisfied until he wakes the Water Hens and makes them cry, and I lie awake and listen to their protests. I love country winter nights, Felix !"

"Do you," he said absently, and we stood a few minutes in silence.

"Joan, I wonder if you would tell me whether, some day, you are going to marry Lord Elksmoor?"

"Have you heard that I am?" I asked.

"Everybody expects to hear it!" he replied.

"Yes, I suppose so. It is very silly of everybody. I refused him months ago!"

"You refused him, Joan! He is the most eligible man in London, and a sterling good fellow to boot."

"He is all that and more. He is one of my best friends. I can't marry all my best friends, can I?"

"Not exactly. Be serious a moment, Joan. Lady Jane Weston wanted to give him a helping hand this autumn by asking him to Southridge at the same time as yourself. She is set on the match and openly acknowledges it is after her own heart."

"I cannot marry to please my friends, and Lady Jane apparently does not give me credit for knowing my own mind. She knows I refused him."

"That was not the complexion she put upon it."

"She has no business to discuss me or my affairs."

Felix laughed.

"She is a dear, old-fashioned soul, who has your welfare and happiness truly at heart."

"She has mothered me for years. But in the matters of love and marriage I must go my own way, Felix."

I said good-night hastily and went into the house.

I am a wilful, wayward creature, Keith, and not worthy of Paul Elksmoor—or anybody else.

When I said I was not going to marry the most eligible man in London, I heard, right under Felix' moustache, a low muttered "Thank God!" that I am sure I was never intended to hear.

XX.

December, 31st.

Felix left yesterday morning by the eleven o'clock train. It was sudden and unexpected, and the result of a letter that was forwarded to him. A friend in sudden and great financial difficulty wants to consult him, and wrote in utter despair. I could see what Felix feared, though he did not put it actually into words. It seems this friend is married to a social butterfly, and as Felix remarked, "At a crisis like this he is not likely to confide his trouble to her." The letter of course was received four and twenty hours later than the writer of it had anticipated, and this was an additional cause for worry.

But there was no earlier train, and Alec and I drove him down to the station in the nursery car.

His mind ran on the trouble of his friend. Mine was agitated lest he should overtax his own strength, and undo the good the Manor Farm had done.

"Joan, my friend, the inducement to get sound again is far too strong and insistent to be lightly disregarded."

"Alec," I said laughing, "Can't you and I offer

him a prize if he is good and gets well quickly—a prize is such an encouragement."

"That's exactly what I want," he laughed.

"We'll take you for a picnic!" Alec announced.

He looked at me.

"And *your* prize?"

"If you were very good I would try and write that book." It was the biggest thing I could think of.

"Done, Joan, done," he cried heartily.

We drove into the station yard in the wake of a sleepy station omnibus.

"We will have our picnic in the Primrose days, Alec," he said, and tucked the rugs well about us.

He still stood talking. The train came speeding round the bend. The gates over the level-crossing had been shut, and Felix had his ticket yet to get.

"Don't forget that prize scheme!" he cried as he hurried off.

"No! no!" we shouted. "Good-bye and good luck."

At that moment a smart motor car turned into the station yard at terrific rate, and Lady Sybil Reid alighted quickly. She caught sight of Felix.

"I am going to town," she announced.

"So am I," Felix told her. "Look sharp, the train is in. We miss it if you loiter!" and they disappeared together.

When I reached the Manor Farm again, I went to my sanctum. The Indian god greeted me with his quiet, serene placidity.

"You never feel anything!" I said pointedly to him.

He smiled, and somehow the smile was comforting, even though it was the same smile he wore before I spoke, and has worn ever since. The old year dies to-night.

January, 1st. Ever so many Happy New Years to you, Keith. About a fortnight ago you lost your way somewhere, or you were looking for something you had lost—at least so did a spirit of restlessness in me interpret matters.

On New Year's morning a time-honoured old custom is observed here. The village widows go round to the larger houses of the parish and are made welcome with hot cakes and coffee, and a small dole is given to each. They arrived, as many as would venture on the long round—for the farm houses are widely scattered—about ten o'clock. They came into the Dining Room, and soon there was a delightful clacking of tongues. It was the most interesting hen party I was ever at. I could have listened to them for hours.

The widow sitting next to me had a wonderfully picturesque way of putting things. She indicated her neighbour.

"She be the oldest widder in the place. She hev had fourteen children, and only two livin', and now her husband is gone."

"Yes," this old body acquiesced—and she is

Martha Heskin's mother—"I've seen a lot with childer'. The two I have livin', bless 'em, wouldn't ha' been here now if I hadn't gone to a wonderful herb man, when they was mortal bad. I walked seven mile with Martha in my arms.

"'What's the matter wie her?' the man asked me.

"I telled him I had lost several with convulsions, and I thought to lose her.

"'No, you won't,' he says. 'Gie her this medicine and she'll do.'

"It cost me two shillings, it did, Miss. But Martha be here now, as you knows, and the mother of a big family."

"And the other one?" I asked, for I wanted to hear the rest of the story.

"Yes, Miss, she hev more to tell, if so be you would like to hear," my neighbour allowed, and Martha's mother continued.

"I thought surely I should ha' lost Tom. He was too bad to take to the herb man. I left him with a neighbour, and I went and told him jist how bad he war.

"He looks hard at me and says:

"'When you git home you'll hear he has been worse yet. But I ha' some'at for him.'

"And he had too, for when I hurried back wie it, seven miles, Miss, the neighbour cries, 'for ever I was in at the door, 'He's as bad as he can be to be alive!' We gave him a dose, and he slept. And that was

how I seft that babe. And now they both be good childer' to me, bless 'em."

The old woman hugged her satisfaction to her, genially.

Something by chance was said of the moon. It started off my neighbour on what appeared to be a favoured topic, and turning to the elder Mrs. Wartley she appealed to her.

"You knows, Mum, as well as any of us, as how por Job Summers has worse fits and more frequent at the full moon, and how mad Hannah, her that is dead and gone, was more wiolent regular as the moon came to the full."

Then she turned to me.

"I don't know, Miss, as you knows ought about a curin' of a pig, but if ever you has to do it, don't you ever hev your pig killed while the moon be waning. If you do, Miss, it'll waste as the moon wastes." Very solemnly this.

I promised, without a smile, to bear the advice in mind.

"Likewise, Miss, you should never cut your hair with a wasting moon, and never sow seeds."

And thus I sat there, gleaning a strange insight into humble lines of thought. One's point of view counts for an immense deal, and colours life. The standpoints of these placid little widows are far more poetic than my own. I am receiving a liberal education. I sat, metaphorically, at their feet.

Presently they all rose to depart. This was their

first visit and they had yet far to go. They wished us Happy New Years with charming heartiness and gusto. It is a delightful thing to entertain the village widows on New Year's morning!

I found a letter from Felix at the Post Office this afternoon. It is a terrible business, this, of his friend, Wilfred Skelton. His wife would not face it. She has a little money of her own, and she has left him in the thick of the battle, alone. Felix is filled with righteous indignation. He writes: "Skelton is one of those men who naturally leans on others. It is pitiful to see him. I dare not leave him for a time."

On my way back I met Captain Marshall and Ruby Cameron. They were returning after a run with the beagles.

Ruby seemed to think it necessary to say: "Bob never has time for this kind of dissipation!"

Her face was flushed, her hair dishevelled, but she looked distractingly pretty, and so, I am sure, thought Richard Marshall.

You remember, I foretold at their first meeting a possible flirtation between these two. But with all the bombastic pride of the prophet I cannot quite say there is any flirtation at all. Only that these two enjoy each other's company. Yet, when I think of the unsuspecting Bob, little, ugly, indignant misgivings assail me. I do not look upon Ruby as a tower of strength. I suspect the lines of her hand would declare her heart to be a stronger point than her

head. I don't know that a flirtation, however mild and transparent, would be good for her.

A great boxful of Carnations and Lilies of the Valley came this morning, also from Felix. I have gloated over them ever since. Flowers in the country are far more beautiful, and poetic, and satisfying than flowers in London, I suppose, because there is a more exquisite sense of fitness, and harmony, and congruity.

XXI.

January, 7th.

SATURDAY, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, we never saw the sun. I had to try and make sunshine in my heart by singing, as I went, some quaint old rhymes and verses I keep at the back of my mind for needful occasion:

> "Now she's cast off her bonny shoon
> Made o' gilded leather,
> And she's put on her Hieland brogues
> To skip amang the heather.
> And she's cast off her bonny goon
> Made o' the silk and satin,
> And she's put on a tartan plaid
> To row amang the bracken."

which strikes me as a delicious eulogy of—old clothes. Then I struck upon:

> "True it is she has one failing.
> Had a woman ever less?"

and so on through the whole assortment.

Then a change came in the shape of a spell of frost. It was so sorely needed by the sad, water-logged soil,

that one rejoices, and rejoices more still for the dear, patient sheep. The sheep-folds have been in a terrible state for weeks. John Wartley acknowledged he had never seen sheep in a worse plight. Some of them must have carried pounds of sodden mud hanging to them, and so persistent has been the rain I cannot conjecture even the weight of water in their fleeces. This year they have plenty to eat. Last year the hay and root crop so nearly failed altogether that on some farms sheep grew too weak to stand.

Wednesday morning we found the night had laid a white frost over the sleeping earth. Oh! the daintiness of it all against blue sky and a radiant sunshine! No ploughing is possible, for the earth crust is iron, and all the men can do is to go 'muck carting.' I love to know these things of the real life as it is really lived. It does not matter when only bricks and mortar and London smoke are round you, but here with earth and sky the biggest things about you the earth story is a fairy story. Thank God! I can always throw myself into the life about me. I suppose I am an emotional woman, not hysterically nor crudely emotional, I hope. But I rejoice in wholesome feeling. I dread to think that as I grow older my range of emotion will grow narrower. It shall not if I can help it.

On Monday, if the frost holds, the flooded meadows below the church will be safe to skate on. It will be better than 'Princes' I think. I coaxed Granny Wartley to my sanctum this morning. I settled her

in a big chair by the fire, and sat myself at her feet, and bade her talk.

"Tell me of life as you know it," I pleaded.

As I spoke there came the rattle of milk pails being washed; then the clank of a pump handle; a cow bemoaning the removal of her calf; and the whistling of a farm hand. The cow had bemoaned in the same fashion the night through, in sad persistence; the whistling was light-hearted and merry.

"Life as I know it!" the little lady said slowly. "Ah, my dear, but it has ran so smoothly, there's little to tell. I read of men and women drinking the bitter dregs of the cup of life. I read of devouring love and hate, and over-mastering passion, but the Lord has not laid my path where these things lurk."

Then, somehow, she was tempted back to the days of her girlhood and youth, and I had the pretty, simple story of them.

"I come of old yeoman stock," she said. "I was an only daughter, and my two brothers, both years older than myself, emigrated to Australia while I was still small. The old people made much of me, for I was the child of their old age. My mother died when I was sixteen, and I became my father's constant companion. He was a dear, lovable old man, and I was content. When I was twenty, or thereabouts, John Wartley would have me marry him. I had a notion my duty was to stay with my father, seeing I was all he had, and I sent John away, though I am

bound to say it was a sore trial to me, for I loved him. A bit later a second suitor came to woo me, but he was above me in station, and though I was flattered, I persuaded myself he was but amusing himself.

"I believe now, my dear, he meant every word he said, but I shall never know for certain—in this life.

"A year after, my father died. I was alone. Of the two men who had asked me marry them, Julian Stoddard was in India, John Wartley was in the next county. When I had refused to marry him he had said: 'If ever you change your mind, one word is all I shall want, Bessie.'

"My dear, I sent him just the one word, and the day he received it he was at my side. He rode the fifty miles that lay between us. We were married, and for thirty years never an angry word passed from one to the other. When he lay dying that fifty mile ride was in his mind.

"'Press on, Laddie! I'm over-anxious to reach her!' he muttered time and again. Then it would be, 'She'll think I'm slow, Laddie!' And yet again, 'My beastie, we're almost there!'

"Laddie was the best horse that ever he had, and because he bore him right well that ride, he loved him as few men love their horses.

"'I wasn't merciful to him that day,' he would often say, 'for the minutes were hours until I reached you.' Yet I knew he had ridden with care and judgment—he loved Laddie too well to do otherwise."

And now in these latter times, her piety, and her

knitting, her ready sympathy, and that wonderful discerning and penetration keep her young, and make her happy. I am glad to know the life the dear old soul looks back upon, and the memories she cherishes, especially as it is all so peaceful and unruffled. "A sheltered life," she calls it.

For all the serenity of her days and nature, a strong infusion of sentiment and romance permeates her being—as, perhaps, you guess. Would you believe it, she is half inclined to think Felix hurried away because I refused to marry him. As she ended the recital of her own simple story, she stroked my hair.

"It is a great thing to know gold from dross!" she remarked tentatively, "and to take the gold when it is offered."

"How mercenary that sounds!" I said, wilfully misunderstanding.

"Say, rather, the gold only is worth taking,"—she would go her way.

"I think you fail to recognise the sterling gold from the dross!" She stooped lower over me. "An old woman prays you may know better some day, my dear."

"You don't take what is not offered," I said. I could not let her follow a false scent any longer.

She just laughed.

"My little child," she said softly, and put her arms round me. "I never was counted blind yet!" she added.

The whistling out of doors began again with a

merrier ring than ever—the tune was Yankee Doodle. Then a laughing voice called: "Susannah—I say, Susannah!"

Keith, I went a long ride on the Great Auk after that. We went bravely and gallantly, and the sun shone, and the grass blades were outlined in white frost—and it froze still where the sun did not reach—and you know what a frosty air does for the soul of a man, or a woman. It makes it rejoice.

Once I passed a shepherd with his crook, his dog, and his flock of ewes, and he gave me courteous greeting. When he had passed me a few yards, he turned and shouted something I could not hear, and pointed upwards. It was to show me a great Heron, high above us. Gladness seized me at the sight of the great, grey bird, with outstretched legs. I went back to the man to make sure it was a Heron.

"Yes, Miss! Hansers we calls 'em. 'Tis counted luck to see 'em, rale good luck the year through. Used once to be a Heronry in yonder spinney. But one spring a gamekeeper chap, who ought to ha' been hanged for it, killed all the young birds. And what for do yer think, Miss? No wonder you can't guess. To hang up their carcases till they runned wie maggots for food for his young pheasants. From that day to this no Heron hev nested in these parts."

I thanked the man for the story of the craven-minded gamekeeper and went my way, a little chastened to think of the most artistic birds God ever made, thus done to their deaths.

I took my horse down the steep hill to which the Fir trees cling, and into the Beech wood beneath. The white frostiness, the dry crisp leaves, the green, smooth tree trunks (no tree trunks charm as those of Beech), the cold, sharp stillness cast their spell upon me. It was like some natural temple, you almost held your breath to be alone there. It is Hans Andersen who first makes you conscious of your love for trees. Then Browning takes you farther and weaves the spell of mystery about them. Both of them imbue them with a sense of personality.

In the village I overtook Mrs. Cameron. Even from the back view I noticed she looked less elate than usual. Her face, when I saw it, was gloomy. She nearly let me go with a passing greeting. But a sudden impulse, apparently, made her stop me. I believe she had arrived at that stage of internal perturbation when she had to confide in someone.

"I am anxious about Ruby. I do not know what has come over the child!" she said.

I knew well enough she did not need me to tell her.

I suggested a change would do her good.

She fixed me with a penetrating look.

"Then—*you* have seen the state of affairs!" She could not be anything but outspoken if she tried. "And she an engaged girl!" she muttered.

"That is why it matters, isn't it?" I said calmly.

"Her Aunt Diana must invite her to Harrogate," she said desperately, and added, "I doubt if she will go."

"She might be glad of an opportunity to pull herself together," I said cheerily.

Mrs. Cameron fumbled in a little bag that took a good deal of opening, found a pocket handkerchief, and dabbed her eyes.

"And if the frost holds there will be skating on the Church Meadows in a day or two, I hear. People will begin to notice."

She looked at me in a bewildered, helpless way. This matter is out of her province.

"I wonder," she said forlornly, "what course I ought to take?"

I felt it was a foregone conclusion that whatever she might do would be futile. She is the last person in the world to cope with a situation demanding tact and delicacy.

It seems this flirtation is assuming proportions not entirely to be ignored. It is all very well to amuse oneself *pour passer le temps*. But a flirtation that is only, and can be only a flirtation, should die a graceful and natural death, and be decently buried.

Keith, in thè depths of my own heart I know quite well it is useless to treat this matter in a light, frivolous way. It is not a flirtation at all—but something deeper, sterner and more serious. Something from their first meeting has drawn them together. I know Richard Marshall is a good man, and honourable to the core. But I am troubled. I fear the eternal triangle—one woman—two men.

XXII.

January, 14th.

We have been vouchsafed a week's skating. The Church Meadows are in popular request. Every day sees a festive gathering of the country-side. It amuses me, for I meet all sorts and conditions of country folk, and there is much good nature, friendliness, and kindly hilarity.

The modern country girl does not compare favourably in my eyes with her town-bred sister. I do not mean this for harsh criticism, but the town girl has something to counterbalance her modernity which her country sister lacks. Ruby is not a "modern" girl.

Mrs. Cameron's apprehensions concerning the skating were not altogether groundless. People begin to notice this intimacy of Richard Marshall and Ruby Cameron—and to notice is to talk. No one with eyes to see can doubt they are powerfully attracted to each other. I ask myself: How is this to end?

Every morning when we arrive on the ice we find an old soldier standing about, 'to see the fun.'

"It's a bit of life!" he confesses apologetically, "and it carries me back to old days—and the regiment.

Many years I was in the thick of life out in Indy and China. Life ! ah, that was life. It's natural, ain't it, Miss, I should go back over them days when I stand here and watch yer all? " he asks.

This trim, gallant corporal has taken a fancy to me because he knows the Dad was a fighter, and I have told him of you. I am 'on the strength' in his eyes. These latter days are hard ones for him. He lives with his sister, and her husband is stricken with some grievous malady. He is frequently wandering and 'light-headed,' but when he is sane, he has, to use the old soldier's phrase 'taken against him,' and swears and curses at him, thinking he is sponging upon him. For all that the Corporal is passing good to him. When he is violent at night, he sits the hours through at his bedside, and his humble pension is at his sister's service. He is cheery and light-hearted. I take him down a London daily paper—a great treat to the old man. It delights him to learn how it 'fares' with all the portions of the earth he has known. The other day, I heard he had sold his medals to get extra comforts for the sick man. I must try to get them back, for, as his sister confessed, they were the pride of his heart. He is eighty-two, but as upright and trim as if he had been drilled yesterday. How one respects disciplined human nature !

I am making headway with my book. I feel that to get at the soul and spirit of life, as life is in this country-side, I must depict no fanciful Arcady.

Hitherto, my books have touched life lightly and frivolously. I cannot be ponderous, for I have not sufficient wisdom. I could skim off the cream of amusement even here for my book, if I chose, but I long to catch the soul of the people. Life is eloquent. I am halting. My heart sinks, rises again. I sigh, I sing. Am I Hedonist sufficiently? Have I the courage to keep my hold on the slow pulse that beats here—the trifles that fill the day? If these things are beyond me, I had better leave my pages unwritten.

January, 15th. Bob Ingleby has spent little time on the ice. Either he has not the time to spend, or he does not choose to spend it. Even Basil Cameron has been down more than he, drawn thither, I suppose, by the presence of Margaret Derston. She is a wonderfully graceful skater.

I ask myself if Bob's suspicions are aroused. Whenever he comes he finds Captain Marshall and Ruby skating together. Bob is the life and soul of the crowd for a space, then he disappears with the plea—he is busy.

This afternoon an accident happened. Some small boys ventured, from pure cussedness, on the only unsafe spot, and paid for their lawlessness.

"Crack she bears, bend she breaks!"

they shouted in bravado, and break 'she' did, and let some half dozen urchins into the water, with piercing shrieks and yells.

The water was not deep, but deeper here than elsewhere, where a drain runs in and the ground dips. The rest is as safe as a house, and that constituted the great danger, for the fear was, they should be drawn under the ice. Captain Marshall and two or three other men were quick to the work of rescue. Ruby stood beside me. Evidently, she lost sight of Richard Marshall for a moment. She seized my arm ; she was trembling from head to foot.

"He will be drowned ! " she wailed, just above her breath. She loosed her hold. She would have thrown herself into the gaping cavity if I had not held her back forcibly. Richard Marshall was the last to be dragged from the water, and he was practically in a state of collapse. A horse-cloth was produced from somewhere, and he was carried off. Ruby tried to tear herself from my grasp, but for her own sake I held her tight, and uttered a sharp word of caution. It was unheeded. She was beside herself. Fortunately, she was unobserved. In her agony of suspense unguarded words broke from her—words that betrayed her wild love and devotion to Richard Marshall.

Keith ! I feel the climax is drawing near, so far as these two are concerned. We are just marking time. I feel as if I have known it from the beginning. This powerful attraction between them brings to my mind the love story of Frank Bell and Muriel West. Their's was, or rather, their's is the most perfect love story I have ever known. Muriel has told me that from the hour they met, they knew what must be.

For years Frank had seen her face in his dreams. They never met at all as strangers. At that first meeting of Richard Marshall and Ruby Cameron I felt there was some spell upon them. Frank and Muriel were free. But in this case there is—Bob. It is the old, old story, as old as the human race—and I cannot help but look ahead.

Later. I hear Richard Marshall is none the worse for his adventure. As for Ruby, I took her home myself, and to her own room, and put her to bed. Mrs. Cameron was out, so that I had every excuse, and when she returned Ruby was safely between the sheets—and safe from prying eyes. She had been weeping bitterly, and she confided to me, poor child, the whole truth of her love for Richard Marshall—"And his?"—I asked.

"He has never told me he loves me—but—he does."

There was a world of assurance in those two final words.

I had not meant to tell you this, but as with my own affairs, it must be all or nothing—so with this—if I only tell you portions you will realize little of the true inwardness of the story. You will say I am making too much of it, and letting my imagination run riot. Now, that you know I am behind the scenes, you must accept what I tell you as truth, and not romance.

The invitation from Harrogate duly came some days ago, but Ruby refused it. I suppose she found

it impossible to tear herself away. The time for common sense has gone by—fate has them in her firm grip—but, surely, a man of the world, as Richard Marshall ought to be, will do something—Bob has to be considered in this matter.

XXIII.

January, 22nd.

Richard Marshall has gone. I believe he is staying with friends in Torquay. The fact that he *has* gone is the thing that matters. It shows he is not blind to duty. He is taking the most honourable course he can.

He went four days ago.

Yesterday, I saw Ruby. I have never pitied human being as I pity her.

Poor little thing! This overpowering passion is altogether too great for her. It is a love you would expect of some noble, great-souled woman. It well nigh crushes her.

I spend much thought on this matter. I have come to the conclusion that if anything on this earth could persuade me to believe in reincarnation, it would be a case like this. I put it this way. In some previous existence these two loved each other. And, perhaps, what rarely happens, has happened—their lives are again simultaneous—and they cross each other's paths. Think how it would be bound to be with them, if they had been lovers such as Abelard and Helöise.

I feel as if I were writing of some great mystery ! Without the knowledge I have of Frank and Muriel Bell's wonderful story, I dare not have written what I have. I have this to help me in understanding these two. I see but one ending.

The weather has found its latest expression in a fall of snow, heavy enough to make a white world. I came upon a covey of partridges in an open field. The birds looked as if they felt themselves alarmingly conspicuous. They squatted as close to the ground as possible, as if they sought to make themselves appear a colony of mole hills. I spent a long time following wild tracts through the snow. I started a hare lying low in a furrow and so learned to know his trail. How exhilarating and adventurous little things like this can be. Dear God, how good they are !

I have another love story to tell you which is also being enacted under my nose. It too, has gone awry. But it is simple and crude, and commonplace beside that other, especially as I see the two in sharp contrast. It is not wise to weigh these things in the balance.

Susannah's swain is in trouble !

You remember Susannah is one of the maids at the Manor Farm. He is the light-hearted whistler I hear below my sanctum windows, as he comes and goes with his milk pails, or 'swill' for the pigs.

This Albert Hylas is a handy man, and when he is not milking cows he is feeding stock, or 'littering' yards, or cutting turnips. This last he does by turning a handle. He thinks a good deal of himself,

and Susannah is proud, or *was* proud, I should say, of his virtuous conduct.

"He has seft money," she confided to me one day, "and he is teetotal. He don't even relish a pint o' master's ale when 'tis offered—as it is when he may help to shake a carpet."

Now, this exemplary Albert Hylas has lost his savings. In consequence, Susannah is inconsolable.

"More than enow to buy rale good furniture, he seft. And he to lose it of all men on this blessed earth!" she whimpers.

I suggested lost things are often found.

"Ses he set pickin' o' feathers for the feather bed. He hev a fancy for feathers rather'n for flight. Though ter be more woman's work than man's, he undertook to pick 'em. Take more'n Job's patience to pick feathers, it du, Miss. Well, he sets the Saturday evenin' at the job, and never went nigh the Blue Lion, and Sunday mornin' the money were missin'."

I tried to console, but without much success.

"I telled him the money war somehows buried in the feathers, and he went to make sure it warn't. He comes back lookin' like a silly, half-plucked fowl hisself, that kivered with feathers he was. He just shakes his head, Miss, and looks doleful."

Some days passed, and no money turned up. A lamentable thing happened meanwhile. This cheery, buxom Susannah grew suspicious. She knows how the Sunday mornings are spent by a good number of

the humble population. The men foregather on the allotments to play cards. Some say gambling is not unknown. The evil cannot be stopped, it seems, as the law now is, and they play on land in their possession. Susannah is convinced that Albert has become one of these card players and gamblers, and lost his money in this way, and dares not face her with the truth. She tosses her head.

"It's like a great, hulking lout to make as if he had lost it unbeknown to hisself," she mutters. "Men"—she says nothing of women—"ain't never above temptation. My mother says that, and I believe her. She've had good cause to say it, Miss. Men's like scrap-iron, scarce worth the hevin'."

I suggest if Albert maintains he did not lose his money at card playing she is wise to believe him. She regards me solemnly.

I fear Susannah has a very poor opinion of my knowledge of men-kind as compared with her own.

She finds an outlet for her feelings by banging doors, breaking plates and dishes, and dropping tinware.

Albert no longer sings or whistles, and comes not to the scullery door. Storm signals are hoisted at all stations.

I could not resist, when I saw the depressed air he wore, telling him it was my great hope the money would be found. He sighed, apparently from the soles of his boots.

"The money is bad enow, Miss, but Susannah's suspicions is wuss. I never should hev thought it

of her. Women's kittle cattle, beggin' your pardon, Miss, but I never thought Susannah war."

"Let us hope this is only a storm in a tea cup, Albert," I said cheerily.

"It ain't that—it's a storm in a man's heart, Miss—and I ain't sure it ain't the wreck of a man's happiness. I can't abear a suspicious woman."

It is a grievous thing there should be trouble such as this between the two, with the sun shining, the sky blue, the sharp, glad, frosty air about us—and the spring time coming.

But a man must gang his ain gait, and wait until fortune shines upon him—and so must a woman.

The wedding was to have been in six weeks' time.

Albert is a lodger. He makes his home with a worthy shepherd and his wife. In a second conversation I had with him on the subject, he confided:

"It's rale uncomfortable for Ezra Whitman and his wife, and they don't like it, though I am keerful to tell 'em I h'aint no suspicions of their havin' took it. There was bank notes and there was gold, Miss, a rale good sum too. To think that Susannah should happen with the notion I ha' gambled it away, beats me hollow!"

I asked why he had not put the money in the bank.

"Because, Miss, I had a bigger faith in myself than in the bank!"

It appears he pays eight shillings a week for his board and lodgings. And besides his week-day wages he earns Sunday money. And for eight years now

he has earned full harvest wages, which means seven pounds ten shillings each harvest. He is thrifty, and therefore that bag of money must have held a considerable sum.

This morning I had a long letter from Felix Harridon. He still remains with Wilfred Skelton, who, in his turn, is awaiting a climax in his affairs, and is well nigh distracted. When it is past, Felix speaks of getting him abroad for a time. He says I am to understand that it is a bitter disappointment not to complete his cure at the Manor Farm.

"Come what may, I shall arrive in time for that picnic in the primrose days, Joan!"

He goes on to speak of the book and tells me to make much of the quiet, beautiful setting. And he ends up with this:

"What do you say to our turning trippers for a day, yea, veritable trippers? For whoso takes a trip, is—a tripper. Ours shall be to the sea. I found out it was under an hour's journey from Pelton. I know your passion for waves. Let us then to Helston for a day—you and I, Joan. I like Red Letter days. It is worth while, in every life, deliberately to set about making a few of them, over and above those the gods send us. One day I shall turn up like a wayfarer, and ask to be taken in, and so complete my broken holiday."

Yet one more paragraph from the letter I will give you.

"I am glad to know the setting your life has these

days. Saturate yourself with the spirit of the quiet country things, and let them grow into your soul."

That last was particularly appropriate. The things of the country are sinking deep into me. And not only the beautiful and poetic things; the prosaic things also. You may laugh, Keith, at my acknowledging that I am driven to keen emulation.

You must know, 'Granny' Wartley is a house-proud soul, and was so especially when she held the housekeeping reins in her own hands. Even yet, it is her delight to achieve some culinary victory. She has rare skill in the art. An event of some moment has befallen. A pig has been killed into the house—and I have salted and cured him. As a result I am inflated with pride. As I have told you, the spirit of emulation entered into me, and made me daring and presumptuous. I asked as a great favour, and under the most searching and careful supervision, to be allowed to 'do up' the pig.

Permission was graciously accorded me.

Knowledge is power. Experience teaches. I have put these shrewd, old-wives' proverbs to practical test. Primed with the *knowledge* of how to cure a pig, I am suffering from inordinate self-conceit, and the longing to tell everybody that I know—a very human and very general fault. With the experience I have learned much. Ethics and philosophy are not outside the matter.

My request filled 'Granny Wartley' with a charming excitement, and May, seeing the pleasure it would

give the little lady, suggested I should have my instruction from her.

We went to the kitchen as light-hearted and gay as ever went curers of pork. Our elation was worth a good deal.

With the little lady went a well-worn, time-honoured shagreen book, that was to guide us in our work.

"It is the same ham recipe I have used all my life!" she confided proudly, and added: "the same that has been used in my family a hundred and fifty years, I daresay."

Susannah entered into the affair with spirit—the adventurous spirit.

"You'll never be able to say again, you don't know how to salt a pig, Miss. Albert has been saying, though not to me, it is one of the best pigs he ever fatted. Put on a good stone weight a week, it did, and ate his barley-meal almost like a Christian!"

I was glad I had such an exemplary specimen to take in hand.

There lay spread out before us ham, sugar, and black treacle, and salts of sorts and kinds, and juniper berries, and what not. And in a few minutes I was in the thick of the adventure. This portion was for lard, that was for pork pies, this for ham pickle, and that for bacon.

It was a fine adventure. Go to, dull care and carking anxiety—you have no place where a portly pig is being cured. All must be gentle hilarity, and

lightness of heart. It is work you might do to the strains of martial music or to the merriest rag-time tune that ever was made.

I trust you think I spent a profitable morning. Of course I was minded of Lamb's roast pork, and of an old, old nursery sing-song that has to do with little pigs that went to market, and little pigs that stayed at home, and other little pigs that could not find their way home (perhaps those who had gone to market).

XXIV.

January, 28th.
Inverness Terrace, W.

This is Barbara Seaton's wedding day. I sent her one of Hilda French's cleverest studies in pastels as a wedding gift. I refused my invitation to the marriage in the first instance—"owing to absence from town." A letter came a day or two later from Lady Jane Weston hoping she would meet me there, and we would have a cosy chat instead of inspecting the presents. I knew that cosy chat meant a bit of special pleading on Paul's account. She said as much. She thinks I am woefully blind to my own interests.

Truth is, she sets her loving old heart on seeing me a harassed, political hostess. And she imagines that if she sufficiently exercises her persuasive powers she will bring it about. I do not intend her to succeed.

When I read this letter I was glad I had refused the wedding invitation. But later, because Barbara has always puzzled me to distraction, I felt I must see her in a rôle she is not likely to play again. She would be interesting, I knew. I wondered if she

would be illuminating. And, anyway, I am one of her oldest friends.

I wrote and told her I was going after all. In answer to that she sent me the most charming, the most piquant, the most delightful letter I ever received.

Aunt Mary has taken me in, and is by way of being pleased to have me for a visitor. We have been to the wedding together.

Barbara made a radiant vision of studied gracefulness. I judge she is not in love, but complacent, happy, and content, as a woman should be, who makes no great demands on life. I foretell she will become an exemplary wife—especially for a man a dozen years older than herself. She is older than her years. She has never been young, is nearer the truth. It would have been good for her to have been in love with her husband—perhaps. But, emotion scarcely has a place in her. This may be woeful misjudgment, for after all, she is a closed volume I have succeeded in opening at but a stray page or two. Colonel Bailey is devoted to his work, a noted shot, bridge player, and billiard player. It is fortunate that his life has many interests.

At the wedding reception I made my way early to Lady Jane, paid my respects, enquired for the special aches and maladies to which she is prone, and allowed myself to be victimized for the space of five minutes.

She besought me to go and see her to-morrow. I had already made up my mind, should she suggest

that, to declare I was returning to Pelton by an early train.

"Pelton," she cried scornfully, "some dead-alive country village—you disappointing, wayward hussy! Now tell me why you bury yourself there? I shall write to Keith," she threatened.

"You are too independent by half—you modern women. You cultivate whims and fancies instead of doing your duties. You are an irrational creature, Joan. It is not good for you. I have half a mind to wash my hands of you altogether."

I repressed the inclination to answer that I wished she would.

She took both my hands in hers, and pressed them warmly.

"Try and learn wisdom, Joan, before it is too late."

"Worldly wisdom, or the wisdom of the ages?" I questioned mischievously.

"Worldly wisdom *is* the wisdom of the ages!" she snapped.

I had arranged with Aunt Mary to come and claim me on some excuse or another, as soon as five minutes had passed. She did not fail me, and feeling I had the best of it, I bade my dear little Godmother good-bye—and fled.

I thought it just possible Felix might have been among the wedding guests. But he wasn't, and I was disappointed.

Aunt Mary does not trouble herself concerning my affairs. I doubt if she knows I have refused the

"most eligible man in London." She is a contented old maid herself, and before now has recommended me to follow in her footsteps. Once, she made the confession that it had always been her fancy to be a widow.

She plays patience every night from dinner to bed-time. She is an adept. It is her great accomplishment, the most enjoyable period of her day. She will not over-fatigue herself lest it should entail less skill on her part. She is overweeningly proud of her cunning. She discusses patience with various cronies at afternoon teas. She realizes it is all a little old-fashioned and out-of-date, but is gracefully resigned to uphold the pastime of yesterday. I am not sure but that she fondly imagines her own enthusiasm may revive the game. In her youth she had to play cribbage every evening with her father. She congratulates herself on her game victimizing no opponent.

I am writing this upstairs before I undress. The theatres are not over yet. London's bed-time is some hours hence. There is the whirl of life and of toil on all sides of me—busy, restless, noisy life. Sometimes, at the farm, I picture this London noise as it is to-night. But now that I am here, I conjure up the quiet, old farm house I have left behind me. I see the garden, with its snowdrops and golden aconites under the beech trees. About this time, John Wartley will be coming in from a last look round at the stock and horses. The bailiff thinks he is the

one to go the final round, but John Wartley draws on his rubber boots, lights a lantern and goes himself, long after his bailiff is in bed and asleep. I see the moonlight over the pond, and red-tiled buildings—and everywhere a great quietness, a friendly solitude. The moonlight nights sometimes make me ache with their beauty. And you are so close to it all. It enters into you.

Once, John Wartley called us out into the night. It rained, and there was a moon rainbow. We stood and gazed, and gazed at the sight—as men and women do at a thing that awes them with its beauty.

I recalled some wonderful word painting:

> "North and south and east lay ready
> For a glorious Thing, that dauntless, deathless,
> Sprang across them, and stood steady.
> 'Twas a moon rainbow. . . ."

It was as if we had stood to witness a miracle.

I love, in this lofty London house, to sit with my head buried in my hands, and recall, at this distance, the quiet things I have seen.

There was a sea mist over the land a week ago or more, and suddenly the sun leaped through it. I could not leave the sight until all was sunshine, and the mist had vanished.

I do not know if it be my own fancy, or if I have somewhere read it, but, to me, a mist is feminine—a woman with brimming tears—wistful, sad, perhaps a neglected woman. When the sun breaks through, it is as if someone had kissed the tears away.

Of the men and women who greeted me as friend or acquaintance this afternoon, there was here and there one I would like to transplant from London to the country. Those they were who know something of the art of life, those who are not bored by quietude and uneventful days. They were not many, but they can pierce the commonplace, and find the gold beneath.

XXV.

CANDLEMAS DAY,
February, 2nd.

I DID some shopping and returned to Pelton the day after the wedding. As a student of the gay old Herrick, that heading of mine may have an especial meaning for you. You remember he bids us on Candlemas Day to pull down our Christmas holly and mistletoe. In accordance, then, with the time-honoured custom, I went with May Wartley this morning to take down the decorations in the church.

When all was stripped bare, and carried into the open, they made a grand pile of spoil. The sexton set them alight. They burned fiercely and noisily. But the insistent thing was—the smell of them.

Do you know the smell of evergreens burning? It is for the gods—a sweet smelling savour, as of incense. It is a beautiful ingratiating fragrance—the essence of them extracted in the sharp torment of the flames.

I stayed with my bonfire until the last flame had died. I fed it as it needed feeding, here and there. What is so like the breath of life entering into us as

the kindling of a fire? The cold material finds soul and spirit, and a new beauty. You stand with bated breath. Will it stay? Will it die? And if it stays you see its soul expanding, and strengthened until it is full of life and warmth—and mystery.

May Wartley had left me as soon as the actual work was done. The fire was play, you see. She is a busy little body, and has not over much time for play. I do not think such pastime, had she stayed, would greatly have interested her.

On my way back I stopped to talk to Martha Heskins. The little Rachel is really ill now. There is nothing definite, but the doctor has given her leave to stay away from school. She is always tired.

"Ah!" Martha says sadly, "I shall have to bear it. I will bear it, when it comes!"

I learn much from my talks with her. I am soothed or braced as the case may be. Her simple philosophy of life is sane and wholesome. Sometimes her stories startle me. Gôitre is not altogether unknown in the village, and it is not many months ago since a little girl was taken to a house where lay a dead woman. The cold hand was laid upon the little one's throat to cure her.

Farther on, I came upon Davy Snow carrying a great faggot of sticks, and Sandy jogging beside him. The old man, the faggot, the dog; it was as if I faced in the flesh—the man in the moon. I was in no hurry and turned to walk a few steps with him. There is a

whisper abroad that he is trying to drown his troubles and perplexities at the Blue Lion.

"Yes!" he says, "I remembers the Pedlars. My grandfather was one on 'em. He went down to the grave, he did, with two tumours on his head caused by the weight of his basket. He carried chiny ornaments and images, specially them dogs for the chimney-piece corners, with hanging ears."

"Have you lived in Pelton all your life, Davy?" I asked.

"Yes, Miss, all my life—and a week longer. My mother flitted to Pelton at the Michaelmas, and I was born the week arter."

We had come down a little hill, and stood in front of a small farm house and buildings.

"I could tell yer something strange about the spot we're a standin' on," the old man said, and stood still to look at me. "Old Moll Pollard did some queer things in her time. 'Twas said as she bewitched man and beast when she thought she would. Anyways, she took a grudge agin Jeremiah Castleton for calling her a hag. One day he was passin' here, hevin' like us, just come down the bit of hill to the level with his waggon and team. Moll touches the waggon, and the horses stopped. Jeremiah, he chucks their heads, and beats 'em, but they didn't move. They *couldn't* move, not one on 'em. Moll, when she had walked down the road and comed back by the lane—witches never retraces their steps, they don't—'Git on with yer, Jeremiah, my man, and don't be for

stoppin' here all the blessed day,' she mocked him with.

"She touched the fore horse, and all the team steps on at once. What do yer think o' that, Miss? Mind yer, I ses them horses couldn't move, and they couldn't, till Moll released 'em. No, not if they had stood till the crack-o'-doom."

I ran in to see Ruby. She is growing into a little ghost. She is like a pluckt flower.

"I will tell Bob I cannot marry him!" she wailed.

It has come to this. I was not surprised, knowing what I knew.

"He has enough trouble already," she sobbed.

"Perhaps he guesses," I hazarded.

She shook her head.

"It's almost too hard to tell him," she muttered.

"Now that Captain Marshall has gone, your old affection for Bob may return," I said softly, though not believing my own words.

She looked at me.

"Don't you understand?" she asked indignantly.

I understood only too well, whatever I appeared to do.

"There is nothing left of me for Bob to love. My love for Richard Marshall is all there is of me. It is my whole being!"

"You have known him scarcely—six weeks, Ruby!"

"I know him better than I know—Bob," she said gravely.

With all her wistfulness and misery there was yet a pride, an ecstasy, a sense of possession that made her raise her head with the air of a queen.

"I never knew the world held anything—like this!"

"That is what thousands of girls say," I said, as derisively as I could.

"They do not mean what I mean."

"How do you know Captain Marshall was not merely amusing himself?" I asked.

"He would not amuse himself like that any more than—God would."

"Oh Ruby! my poor little thing," I cried.

I held her tight.

"Don't pity me—never pity me, now. I cannot explain. I cannot make you understand. I think only a few people in the world would understand. The rest may love, and marry, and be happy—but they do not know."

It sounds like an unsophisticated girl's rhapsody, and sentimental outpouring. But it was not. And the look that was on her face I have seen on human face but once in my life. I saw that same look on Muriel West's face when she had known Frank no longer than these two have known each other. I was as one who stands before something holy. I was awed.

She looked at me again—and she was smiling now.

"I thought I loved Bob deeply and truly. I should have gone on thinking so all my life but—for this. I should never have known better. What a poor,

poverty-stricken little heart I had in those days, Joan ! "

She played with my hand nervously.

"Do you think you begin to understand a little better, now? " she asked.

"I think I have understood almost too well ! "

"I am glad that it is you who—understands ! " she said softly.

I wondered how it would end. Richard Marshall has gone away—and if he have sufficient strength I suppose he will force himself to stay away.

XXVI.

February, 9th.

It seems to me life is more fitly likened to a river with its torrents, its curves, its falls, and rapids, than to the highway to which it is ever being compared.

Foothold is fairly safe on the highway. On the river, torrents, bends, rapids, falls have to be reckoned with. So in life.

To my utmost I would help my fellow-man in the whirl and turmoil, if I could. I recognise how profound are our responsibilities to each other. Yet, life often finds us helpless—because no help is possible. I long to help now—there is nothing I can do.

Richard Marshall has come back.

He looks like a man who has suffered stress and storm—not suffered them merely, but faced them and fought them. I expected a parcel by the afternoon train and I drove the old pony down to the station. The train arrived, and as I waited for the porter to bring my property, Captain Marshall walked out of the station.

I saw him hesitate after he had greeted me. He

walked on a few steps, then retraced them, and asked for a lift.

I told him I was on the point of offering it, and as soon as the parcel was stowed away, we started.

"How is everyone?" he asked.

And when I told him, he became silent, and lost in thought.

I made no attempt to keep the ball rolling. Instinct told me it was not the occasion for small talk.

"When a man is in great perplexity of mind and he can get an unbiassed judgment concerning the subject of his perplexity, it might be helpful to have it, don't you think?" he said at last.

"If the judgment were worth having," I allowed.

He smiled.

"The man to whom I would take this matter is in Africa. I cannot get his advice. You are Bob Ingleby's old friend—will you let me have your view of it—for his sake as well as my own? You will sum it up as a woman of the world!"

I saw it was hard for him to put into words what he wished to tell me.

"Perhaps I know more than you think! I have sharp eyes, and I jump too hastily to conclusions," I said, and added: "Tell me as much as you will, and no more."

"Thank you!" he answered very sadly. "I felt sure from the beginning you saw how it was with Ruby and me. I went away, because I knew she was Ingleby's promised wife. But what was the love

between those two compared to that which is ours—moonlight and sunlight? I have come back to tell her so. She knows it. She wants me. Call this that is between us infatuation, madness, what you will—you cannot get away from the fact—it exists."

"Do not belittle Bob Ingleby's love," I said.

"I did not mean to do that. And I tell you the simple truth when I say I have uttered no word of love to Ruby. It has been enough to be together. I went away to face this thing. It is stronger than we are. We cannot live our lives apart."

"Many lovers think thus!" But I could not honestly leave it at that, because I recognised the difference between *the many lovers* and these two. And awed, in spite of myself, I told him I realized the difference.

"You blame us, though?" he questioned.

"It is not for me to blame!" I said slowly. "No! in my inmost conscience I do not blame you. If you had come here and wantonly set yourself to make love to Ruby Cameron, I would call you traitor. I would have faced you as Bob Ingleby's champion. I cannot, now that I know what I know."

"I suppose you do not realize how astounded I am with myself?"

I looked at him — an honest, plain-spoken soldier.

"I think you may well be astounded! Yes! I understand!" I said.

"Ah!" he said, with a great sigh. "I wonder

how it is you do understand. I dared not expect it. I am deeply grateful."

"There are things in life stronger, if possible, than life itself—strange, mysterious things, to thousands unknown, and unknowable. Kipling's Brushwood Boy knew, didn't he?"

He started as if it were a new thought.

"Yes! he knew— and what he knew, I know."

I told him of Frank and Muriel, which, beside that story of the *Brushwood Boy*, is the only parallel case I recall. When I had ended, he asked me to hear an experience of a man he knew in India. This man was chaplain in a favourite hill station, and he had a wife and two children. A governess came out to them from England. He was a devoted husband, yet he became infatuated with the girl. He did not hide the fact from his wife. He besought her to help him to save him from himself. They did their best, husband and wife together. What a noble woman she must have been, Keith. The girl was sent away. Her heart broke. She loved even as he. She died. The terrible story leaked out, but no breath of scandal was ever raised. He had no sin with which to reproach himself. He lives, a white haired man long before his time. And throughout, his wife has remained nobly loyal.

The darkness was settling in round us, and I felt a great sense of solemnity upon us. We were facing a deep, grave problem, so strange and perplexing that the ordinary emotions were paralyzed. I believe this

thing is inevitable, and therefore we ought to be thankful that Bob and Ruby were not man and wife before fate brought these two face to face.

For Bob Ingleby my heart is full of pity. This trouble of losing his land is no light sorrow, though he has kept it greatly to himself. It has set its mark upon him, and as time goes on, and the land actually passes from him, he will feel it more severely. And now this new sorrow is coming upon him. Richard Marshall told me he would go to him to-morrow morning and tell him all.

XXVII.

February, 16th.

The morrow, after I had seen Richard Marshall, came and went. All day I worried over Bob Ingleby. I wondered how he would meet the blow. I prayed God to send him high courage—and to let him understand. If he can but comprehend this love that calls for his renunciation, he will be better able to face it. Yet, how can he be made to realize that it is inevitable he should stand aside?

The news of Captain Marshall's return quickly spread, and the comments made were none too charitable, so far as I can gather. The world at large is quick to deliver judgment on what it does not understand.

Late in the afternoon, after an uproarious game of romps with Alec and Sonny, I sat at work in my sanctum. A maid came up and asked if Bob might see me there. He came up, and a glance told me he had faced all there had been to face.

He sat down by the fire, and with his mouth set and tense, he asked.

"Do you know what I have come to tell you?"

"I had a long chat with Captain Marshall yesterday. He told me of the love between him and Ruby."

"Why does that fellow suppose his love is greater than mine?" he asked indignantly.

Keith, I do not know how I dared say it—but I did—as gently as I knew how. I said:

"Because it is greater, Bob—as is Ruby's for him greater than anything she has ever felt for you!"

It sounded harsh, and cruel, and almost brutal to tell him this. But I had prayed God to let him understand.

I knelt by the fender, and I did not look into his face.

"All last night and all to-day I have been hoping you would be able to realize this," I said softly.

"Do you think you can measure and gauge the depth of my love for Ruby?" he asked tensely.

"You could die for her right willingly, Bob—Do you think I don't know that?"

"What more could Richard Marshall do?"

"I did not say what I said to hurt you!"

"All right. I know that. You are dead against me, but you would be on my side if you could—wouldn't you?"

"I would, indeed!" I cried from the bottom of my heart.

"I am as grateful as if you were," he said, and added after a bit: "How long have you known of this?"

"Almost from the day they met I saw the strange attraction they had for each other."

"And I, if in those days on the ice, a suspicion crossed my mind, I felt it treachery to Ruby to harbour it," he muttered.

I had one shaft yet to send home, and I sent it.

"When there is love such as theirs, nothing but an actual marriage bond can separate them!" I said deliberately.

He sat looking into the fire—I wondered if he were furious with me.

But presently he smiled.

"Don't you worry over me, little girl. I will do the best I know how. I have seen Ruby—I have given her her release."

There are times when one human being may do his best to comfort another, and there are times when he had better abstain. Commonplace words of comfort would have been like acid in a wound. He was standing now, and I still knelt by the fender. At last I whispered:

"Bite hard on the bullet—it helps—it helps, Bob!"

"Yes! at anyrate it stops a man crying out."

I had done with attempting to make him see the thing from a high-flown point of view—and I cried:

"It is cruel, it is shameful. He had no business to come here, and win Ruby from you!"

He patted my shoulder.

"No! no! don't you change sides. You were

quite right before. Marshall did his best to show me I could never make her happy, while her love for himself is, what it is. He was quite honest and outspoken, and he believed every word he said. And you have been trying to make me believe him too—don't eat your words now."

He looked so strong—and forlorn. I almost wept.

"I shall worry through quite well. Yes, and I will—bite on the bullet—sure enough."

I would have given anything to have felt a great wave of righteous indignation against those two, to have been able to splutter forth angry epithets, and to feel for Bob, warm sympathy, as for one badly used.

Keith, I could not feel these things, beyond that one unconsidered sentence, of which Bob took the accurate measure. I am not indignant with them. I do not blame them.

I told Bob what I felt, and he smiled—ever so sadly.

"It would not have made it any easier to have felt Marshall was a cur, would it? We will leave it as it is, and I will try to understand—perhaps, afar off, and vaguely, I do understand. And anyway, I care about Ruby's happiness. You have helped me to understand."

Helped him to understand! God! what a pitiful little rôle to play, when he was hurt, and miserable, and brave. It was all I could do.

"Tell the Wartleys some sort of a version of the

story ! " he said, and he went out into a wild, wind-driven night.

For the time being, this thing has wrecked my philosophy of life. I am not gauging the temper of life in the heroic spirit. Serenity of mood, the open mind are lacking in me, these days. I have had to side against an old friend—and it hurts. In a little while I shall regain my balance, and I will write you a saner letter.

I arranged with a certain vendor of toys in the village to yield practical proof to Alec and Sonny that February 14th is dedicated to Saint Valentine. The good man thought I was hopelessly antiquated to bring from the grave so obsolete a saint. He was within a little of remonstrance with me. I did not care, and the babies rejoiced. It was enchanting to see them.

How is it the mere names of things fascinate me as they do? I have been studying field names. They are mostly very old, and people cannot tell you the origin of many of them. Never again shall I pass by a field without a lingering wish to know what men call it. A field here is known as "The Swipes," another as "Wootans." Big fields are called "Brecks," one, on this farm, has eighty acres in it. The word "Close" too, is often used ; thus, there is "The Dam Close," "The Open Close," "The Ram Close." There is a great meadow they call Thompson's Wood. No wood remains, just level pasture. It is useless to wonder who was this man—Thomp-

son, who forgotten for all else, lives to-day, in the name of a bit of English meadow.

And what do you think of calling fields "The Iron Snacks," "The Doles," and "The Little Carter Doles?" It is not hilly hereabouts, but where the land does slope, the word hill generally appears in the field name—"The Clippin' Hill Piece," "The Hungry Hills"; while the hills that have been cut into, for gravel, are known as Bartholomew Hills, or rather they are not so known. Nobody calls them anything else than "Bartomer Hills." It is said, once there was a leper house there. To this day, it is a wild, lonely spot.

When I come to look back I find it was Felix who first interested me in nomenclature. I owe many of the minor pleasures of life of this kind to him, I am glad to say.

XXVIII.

February, 22nd.

Your last letter gave me swelling heart-leaps of pleasure. To be able to say—Keith will be home in December—is like listening to a merry peal of bells. Shall I invest in a calf forthwith, and begin to fatten it? Would it grow up meanwhile, and be no longer —calf? I must consult John Wartley. But—you do not care for veal, I recollect. Ah well, dear prodigal, to have you home will be the thing that will matter—veal or no veal. I want you—how I want you!

A few days ago, I went to chatter to the little Rachel. After a time she went out to play, and Martha and I sat talking. I could see that some quiet happiness filled her. Her face radiated pride or gladness, or both. I wondered at the cause, but I asked no enlightenment.

But Martha had it in her mind to tell me, and presently I was listening to her story.

One of her boys—Bill, the heavy loutish fellow she would have sent to escort me to the farm on Christmas Day, would seem to be something more

than merely a lout. That is to say, he seems to be possessed of one of those complex natures we do not readily associate with the tillers of the soil.

Martha realizes this, for she told me:

"I should never have been surprised if he had runned away to sea, or enlisted. I used to live in dread of it. But seemingly it warn't them things he hankered after.

"It was the longing to be a scholard. That was the meanin' of the onrest and the cravin' the boy hev known for years.

"As a little 'un he allus said he wanted to be a school master. But, Miss, he is one of the oldest of 'em, come third he did, and when he had finished his schoolin' there was eight more on 'em younger than him. He had to work as soon as he could, and arn his wittles.

"He allus war a difficult one to deal with, and a time since, he fell in love with a girl a bit above him in life. That is to say, Miss, her father hev the bit o' land at the back o' the mill housen. She, bein' a rare, pretty creature, had lovers in plenty, and all of 'em above my Bill, seein' they has trades."

Martha folded her hands complacently.

"The lad grew terrible moody, and couldn't abear to be spoke to, and none on us knew the reason, for he never said a word about Rose to any on us.

"I don't like to see 'em ill-tempered, none on 'em, specially when I can't fathom what ails 'em. So, one night, Miss, I ups, and goes into the back room

where he sleep, and he bein' a'ready in bed, I sets myself beside him.

"'Summat a come to yer. Somethin' ails yer, Bill!' I said, and jist patted the clothes across his great shou'ders. 'Shall I gie a guess, Bill?' I whispers, I hevin' heard a bit o' gossip what had served to enlighten me.

"'Yer jist in love wie Rose Masters like the rest on 'em!'"

Martha smiled as she pictured the scene to herself.

"I believe, Miss, he warn't sorry to know as I had a knowledge of how things was. But, at the moment, he didn't know how to take it, so far as makin' answer.

"'Yis!' he say at last. 'But t'aint likely she'll take up wie sich as me. Them others what's after her bein' bettern' me by a lot.'

"I knew he spoke the truth, Miss, though I set there as it were digestin' of it. I see my boy's point o' view clear enough, and I knew he felt sorer than he had ever felt, that he had not takin' up the schoolmasterin' trade.

"'Yer father's leg was bad, and there was too many little 'uns when you finished yer schoolin',' I reminded him, as gentle-like as I could.

"He gives a groan, Miss.

"'I wish I could do somethin', mother!'

"Ter cut me to the heart, it did because I could read the despair behind the words.

"'Yis!' I says. 'Yis!' I jest set fingerin' of his socks to see if they was needin' stitches.

"Then—he cries agin:

"'What is there I could do? What do you think I could do?'"

Martha stopped to make up the fire and put the kettle on. I had never realized before what a comely woman she is.

"I ha' allus tried, Miss," she continued, "not to be found wantin', but this here fairly beat me. I didn't know how to answer him. Then, I hardly knows how to tell yer, but a sudden thought comes to me, like an angel unawares.

"'Do, Bill!' I says. 'Do! Don't yer mind old George Hodgeson? He's only a day labourer, but see the respect—the wonnerful respect he ha' won for hisself by preachin' at the Baptist Chapel. It ha' put him above his position—you may say. Yet all the same, he hev ris to it.

"'You've a lot o' book larnin', readin' o' nights all these years,' I tells him. 'And yer hev allus been a clean livin' stiddy lad. Do yer think yer could git up and spake o' Sundays?' I asks him.

"My dear Miss, since then I ha' often thought there was somethin' real comic in my settin' there suggestin' sich things. But we didn't see nothin' o' that at the time. Seemed to us like an inspiration, yer may say. And my Bill was right overcome. 'Twarn't much sleep he got that night for thinkin'.

"All that be months ago now, Miss. But last

Sunday, my Bill preached i' the chapel—preached beautiful he did—and Rose Masters went along o' me to hear him. Crowded, the place was—and they all said it was beautiful."

Martha ended. Her face glowed with love and pride.

"God be werry merciful!" she said simply, and she was smiling still.

"And Rose?" I questioned.

'They are a-courtin'," she confided. "They walks together."

And in a soft, tender voice, she added:

"There is more'n Rose in it, my dear lady. My Bill ha' had a call to a religious life. He be terrible in earnest. May God Almighty prosper him, I says."

I was in the presence of one filled with joy, and wearing the crown of her motherhood with humble, exultant pride. I had never seen quite the like mother-pride before. But this woman is ever showing me new phases of life.

Perhaps, until that inspiration came to her, she may have sometimes known some Hannah-like instincts and yearnings. And I wondered by what paths, and reasonings, and wrestlings, Bill had reached his preaching. I wondered how he had found himself.

I have tried to tell you it all in the simple language Martha used. The story, somehow, makes me love human nature as I never loved it before.

I take it, this is the one big and soul-satisfying

thing of Martha's life. She will gloat over it through all the years she lives. At the present time, it raises her above the trouble that hangs over her, if the little Rachel should fade and die.

XXIX.

February, 28th.

John Wartley looks grave. He takes his business seriously. I am sure life is a bit of a struggle for him. A year ago, he suffered a bad loss. He acknowledged it would take him time to recover. One night, there was the worst case of sheep-worrying known in the district for years past. It was John Wartley's ewe flock, and the after effects were grievous when the lambing time came a few weeks later.

It was a sore trial at the time. The dog belonged to a man without means: there was no question of compensation beyond the destruction of the dog. Now, another trouble has come upon him. This time it is the hoggets—that is to say, last year's lambs now being fatted up to sell at Carminster Fair in April. They are not doing well. Something has come over them, and many have died.

There are deep lines of anxious care on John Wartley's face. He speaks little of the matter, and at meal times he tries to entertain me, as he has always done, with the country things of which I love to hear.

He is doing all that man can do—the folds have

been moved to other fields. The sheep had done well in spite of the long, wet season. During the cold spell, they went ahead grandly. Since the thaw, and the return of the wet—this has come.

Sheep are his hobby. He is known throughout the country as a successful breeder, as his father and grandfather were before him. His sheep are his pride. It is like an illness to himself, when anything ails them. He is just worrying his heart out now.

He is one of the cheerful brigade, who whistles. He does not whistle these days. May is one of those sensitive women, who are acted upon by every mood of those dearest to them.

"John's whistle is more to me than any other sound on earth!" she told me yesterday, and added: "It says—'All's right with the world.' When I do not hear it, I know it is all wrong with his peace of mind."

Poor little woman, she looked wistful and careworn.

The elder Mrs. Wartley, more placid, perhaps wiser than either her son, or his wife, keeps her quiet calmness of mind.

"I have known these troubles a good many times," she says. "They pass over, and we forget them. There are worse troubles than these—and thank the dear Lord there is no shame in one like this."

Thus, she heartens them, and they smile at her indulgently, and they *are* heartened in spite of themselves.

I think she works much anxiety and worry over this matter into her knitting, for all her words.

The evil, whatever it is, was at its worst about a week ago. The last three days there has been improvement. We are fervently trusting this improvement will continue. I breathe more freely.

I cannot help being a little bit amused at the present state of mind of Mr. and Mrs. Marshall concerning their son, and Ruby Cameron. They are nonplussed, almost surprised out of their wits. They had never suspected whither things were tending. They are prosaic souls. Both are indignant at Ruby throwing over Bob Ingleby. They are hurt, surprised, and also indignant, though they try to hide it, at their son's share in the matter. Not for a moment do they realize what the two are to each other. They regard it as a very ordinary love affair, and deem Richard a greater fool than they had thought possible.

"It took his father five years to make up his mind I was the right woman for him to marry. It has taken Richard five weeks to reach the same conclusion as to the woman he should make his wife."

Mrs. Marshall pursed up her lips after saying this.

"I knew a man who came, saw, conquered, married, all in less than a month, and has lived happily ever since," I told her.

"But your friend was not my Richard," she retorted promptly. "My Richard is like his father—in some ways—he is unimaginative, and easily deceived. He wants a wife to be a helpmate."

"I should have thought he was wise enough to

know what he wants!" I said demurely, knowing that if ever man and woman were especially ordained for each other, these were they.

"Not many men know how to choose," she said, and changed the subject.

"I hear John Wartley's sheep are dying by scores, and that he will be ruined!"

I corrected the exaggerated version of the story.

"I had better make a note to tell Anthony before he writes his sermon. It might—make a difference. He does not understand agricultural matters in the least. But he tries to be sympathetic, and to say the right thing."

At that moment the vicar appeared. He also enquired for John Wartley's sheep.

I told of the improved state of affairs.

He turned to his wife.

"In that case, my dear, I shall use the text I originally intended, and keep your suggestion for another occasion."

"For particular events—national mourning, rejoicing, or calamity, my wife has a veritable genius for discovering the text that above all others befits the occasion. I do not approve of women interfering in matters outside their province, but I am bound to give her the credit she deserves on this subject. When the Titanic disaster occurred, she brought me next day, 'There is sorrow on the sea.' I was thunderstruck. I used it, and it was quoted in all the local papers. I almost felt as if I were sailing under false

colours. I had to go round telling everybody where the credit belonged."

"Till I wished I had never thought of it," his wife said, with modest pride in his generosity.

"We are, all of us, hostages of fortune, and a farmer rather more so than most, it would seem. Wartley has had a good deal of bad luck, I understand, and a farmer does not want bad luck added to bad weather. My own knowledge of farming is contained in a few pithy sayings I hear from time to time. Once I heard a dealer quote: 'A farmer who farms without stock will soon farm without money.' I use these sayings sometimes."

He smiled.

"I like to feel I can enter into the lives of my parishioners, especially when they are in trouble."

It struck me there was originality and wisdom in the good man's procedure, and at any rate it shows he means well.

He took me out to see his Indian Runner Ducks.

"I have taken them in hand myself—feed 'em night and morning, and with this gutter, had to buy myself a pair of Wellingtons for the purpose. What a fool that boy of mine is, to be sure. Isn't the world full enough of women that he couldn't find one unattached? Don't like to look Bob Ingleby in the face. I think, all the same, he is the one to be congratulated over this affair."

He rambled on, and I had to listen to his views as to a man's strength and weakness.

I am bound to confess that parents often take the most superficial views of their children's marriages; the sons' especially. It is one of the humorous ironies of life, if such there can be.

Soon—in a few days—Captain Marshall goes to the Staff College. He has strenuous work, and examination before him. Ruby has cousins in London. She is going to stay with them. They will be able to see a good deal of each other. I met them yesterday. She is no longer a shallow girl, with much of her character dormant. She is a woman with a quiet reserve of force, suddenly born in her—a woman capable of I know not what fine action.

They have not come to their own without exceeding bitterness of spirit, suffering, and great perplexity of mind.

I have some quaint old words on love running in my mind:

"The affirmative of affirmatives is love. As much love so much perception. As caloric to matter, so is love to mind; so it enlarges, and so it empowers it."

Perception, enlarges, empowers—they are wonderful words, Keith—they spell, in this case, the growth of a woman's soul.

XXX.

March, 5th.

When March refuses to come in like a lion, she will sometimes enter like a dancing, merry maiden, like Spring herself. It makes us forget the date of Spring's official entry. This is what has happened now. The Elm trees have put off their winter look of deadness for a living purple hue. I see strange buds everywhere—strange to me, because they do not disclose the flowers that will be. I love this budhood with all the joy of anticipation. The bud aspires: when the blossom comes, it will be—attainment. The buds of snowdrops are miracles to wonder at. For days, you see the little white things bandaged and strapped to look upwards—then, the straps give way, and the flowers become drooping bells of loveliness.

It has all become *dear* to me. Elders, and Lilacs and Willow trees have come into my life like beautiful, silent children. There is language I never heard before, sights I never saw, beauty I had not dreamed of, because I had not eyes sharpened to see, yet—in a little while—there will be a greater flood of life, and joy, and ecstasy. I wait for this as one athirst.

A wonderful thing has happened. Hugh Derston has come upon the scene.

Four days ago, Basil Cameron was on the road between here and the village of Cowswell. He found a huddled creature lying by the road side. It was a man in rags, and with blood oozing from his mouth. He had broken a blood vessel. The doctor put him in his motor and took him to the Cottage Hospital.

He looked after him, little guessing who it was. But some sense of familiarity with the face made him pause. And slowly it dawned upon him—this man, in this wretched condition, was—Hugh Derston.

He spoke his name aloud.

The sick man opened his eyes.

"Yes! Hugh Derston!" he muttered.

"What has brought you to this?" Basil Cameron exclaimed.

The man laughed bitterly and feebly.

"I should think you could guess."

And Basil came to Margaret. I was there when he came.

"Margaret!" he said. "I have need of a Sister of Mercy."

I think she had often listened to those words before, and often responded to them. Basil Cameron is in the habit of going to her when he needs help. Neither Mrs. Cameron nor Ruby can do what she can. And men like Basil Cameron know the worth of such an one—to minister.

"Is it the little mad girl at Cowswell?" she asked; "or has Jack Lee had fits again?"

He shook his head.

"It is a sorry wayfarer this time. I overtook him by the roadside."

"Is he dying?" she asked.

"No!" he said; "he is not dying. But I must take you to him."

Something in his manner or look must have given her the clue. She stood up and faced him.

"Is he a stranger?" she gasped.

"Not quite a stranger—only—a—wanderer come home."

He saw she suspected.

"Yes—it is—Hugh Derston!" he told her.

She caught her breath. He went on quietly to tell her of the condition in which he had found him, and of his recognition.

"You will come?" he said.

She hesitated. She was white and trembling, and I knew that this possible return of her husband was an ignominy and shame she had dreaded.

But the sight of Basil Cameron's quiet, convincing face strengthened her. She took the course of submitting entirely to his will and judgment.

"Must I go?" she quivered. It was but a feeble protest, and she did not mean it.

"You must," he said. "I will take you—now. I have the motor."

"I will go!" she said, and went to fetch her coat and hat.

"She is suffering great agony of soul."

Basil Cameron stood looking out of the window. He turned and faced me as I spoke.

"It is her duty to go to him," he said simply.

I do not know so much about that, Keith. Some men make a fetish of duty.

I asked him if he thought he would die.

"He is not dying. He stands a chance with good care and nursing."

In five minutes, Margaret came back. I saw them both into the motor. She was very calm. As we reached the outer door she turned and kissed me, and looked up for a moment into my eyes—a long, steadfast look—the meaning of which I could not read.

As I walked back to the Manor Farm, I tried to picture the feelings of those two speeding side by side to minister to Hugh Derston. An hour before, they had not been absolutely certain that he even existed. Now, his presence will separate them more widely than they have been separated before. They are strong souls. I imagine Basil Cameron to have an iron will, and to exercise stern self-discipline.

If Hugh Derston lives, I foresee that in some subtle, intangible way, their friendship will change. I do not know how, but everything changes when it is suddenly disturbed. My instinct tells me that for years they have accepted the second best, and made

the most of it between the stern limits they set themselves.

A broken blood vessel—men do not of necessity die of that. Once, in a London suburb on one of the cruel hills of outer London, I saw a horse in a heavy dray break a blood vessel. Blood—scarlet life blood poured from its mouth. The carman unyoked it. I stepped from the kerb, and in answer to my query he said: "Yes—he is done for."

When I told the Wartleys what had happened, Granny Wartley looked at me keenly. She sighed.

"I knew I should hear—something—before long. Two nights ago, I heard phantom steps. They came up the stairs and along the passage. I opened my door, for I thought something might ail one of the children. There was no one. Then I said to myself: 'It is a warning!'"

She looked out quietly into the sunlight. She had put her knitting aside.

"I have always been one to receive warnings!" she said gravely. "In the midst of life we are in death," she repeated slowly. "And these warnings never come for nothing."

And now it is four days since Hugh Derston was found. He is no better, even if he be no worse. Basil Cameron does not know yet how it will go with him, and we just wait. Doctor Hastings from Carminster has seen him. He is a little less hopeful than Basil Cameron. And uncertainty stands for

much: it is something akin to mystery, to the 'vague reality.' We wait, we wonder, we question.

I delight to tell you, the cloud passes from John Wartley's face. He went whistling to the stables this early morning. No sheep have died for a week. He knows the worst—and when a man knows that he can summon all his courage, and face it. It is when he does not fathom what may be, when he stands helpless before disaster that anxiety and fear freeze his very soul. I believe there are moments when John Wartley is fine and great, and half a hero. He knows how to take the rough with the smooth.

XXXI.

March, 11th.

How young a spring here makes me feel! I learn many things as a child learns them. A year—like this green year of mine—should be added to everyone's education. I feel inclined to write to the Minister of Education on the subject. There is teaching outside book covers. There is joy, freshness, sanity, I cannot describe. I am glad I came here *before* the spring, to know it, to watch it, to see it come. The longer daylight brings a new, and a more intimate happiness than we can realise in towns. I gaze in amazement over the green seas of wheat blades. I love bare spaces and silence.

Is it possible, I wonder, to feel one's soul growing bigger? Is it possible that I have learned to see with clearer eyes some of the deep mysteries of life?

Hugh Derston is better. He is distinctly stronger, and more able to take nourishment. Basil Cameron, and Margaret, and the nurse do all that can be done. But he is not grateful. He lies there silent, morose, unsmiling, ungracious. When his mood changes he whines to excite pity.

Bob Ingleby says the only astonishing and unaccountable thing Margaret ever did, was to marry this Derston.

"If she had never pitied him, she would never have married him," he mutters, and adds sententiously, "If a woman lets her pity expend itself on a whining hound, there is generally the devil to pay."

It seems that he lost his parents within a few weeks of each other, and had an accident himself soon after. He was lonely, and wretched, and used to come over to the Abbey Farm with piteous tales of woe. "He never had spirit enough to face big timber"—that is the way Bob puts it, and the only decent thing about him was his affection for Margaret—such as it was. His old home was near Carminster, thirty miles from here. But Margaret discovered, less than a month after her wedding, that it had been mortgaged, and for more than it was worth. The mortgage was foreclosed, and it went within a year. He took her to York on some remount business he had in hand. He associated with horse dealers of all grades, and took to drink and drugs. From being the weak fool Margaret had married, he became a vicious knave. No one knows the humiliations and shame she suffered in those days. I do not think anyone will ever know. In the end he left her—to escape justice.

This is Bob's version of the story—the crude outline, which yet tells almost too much for those who can read between the lines, and can picture Margaret —Margaret of all women, figuring in it. It hurts

you even to think of such as she suffering humiliation, and abasement. Yet these are the women often called upon so to suffer. I remember Lady Jane, in one of her softer moments of reflection, saying: "The blows of fate fall where we feel them most intensely. And fate knows each one intimately enough to know where to smite to a nicety."

Lady Jane is often very wise, Keith, where human nature is concerned.

Why Hugh Derston has come to the neighbourhood is unknown. He will not give himself away. It may be taken for granted, I should think, for no charitable purpose.

Sometimes, in the depth of my heart, I feel inclined to blame Margaret for allowing her pity to dominate her whole being, as it must have done. Yet pity, compassion, are divine attributes. I am getting out of my depth, as I often do. We see things crooked and awry that ought to be straight and clear.

There never was any love lost between Bob and his brother-in-law, and in his laconic way he describes him as having "the face of a ferret and a falsetto voice." I do not take that too literally.

You remember, I told you something of the lamentable story of Susannah and Albert. The climax has been reached. It is gleeful, happy and joyous, and only awaits the wedding bells. You recall how dark suspicions on Susannah's part were the cause of a suspended courtship.

Albert's savings have been recovered, and Albert's

integrity is unimpaired. He is no longer under the charge of being a Sabbath breaker, and a gambler to boot. Susannah is satisfied—and sententious, as might be expected.

Talk of exciting a woman's pity ! My own pity has been actively exercised. For weeks I have felt a growing sympathy for the hurt and aggrieved Albert. I pitied him furtively, and I pitied him openly—not so Susannah.

"Lor ! Miss, don't you waste no pity on the likes o' him ! " she remonstrated, while putting unnecessary energy into her task of ironing. "Human nature—when human nature is a por cretur like Albert Hylas, don't deserve pity. He might as well take one o' his cow's halters and hang hisself—for all I cares. I shouldn't go and cut him down."

"Susannah ! " I said severely. "You are a wicked girl."

Susannah stopped ironing. Her jaw dropped.

"Yes ! " she said emphatically, as the enormity of what she had said dawned upon her. "I am "—and she fell to weeping.

"I'm that beside myself for bein' made a figure o' scorn by other girls on Sundays. I don't know what I du say. I don't wish Albert no real wiolence."

A week after that outburst the money was found. I give you the story as Susannah gave it to me, which, in her turn, she had in part from Maria Whitmore, and part from Albert himself.

It seems that last Friday night, Ezra Whitmore—

the man with whom Albert lodges—heard a noise in the night. He awoke his wife.

"D'yer hear ought?" he demanded.

"I must ha' left th' ole cat i' the back house. Ezra, man, go down and let her out—my por knee is set fast with rheumatics. I'm sorry to trouble yer, but yer must just go."

Ezra grumbled a bit, but turned himself out of bed, and went down the stairs, and into the kitchen. There he finds, not the old cat, but Albert Hylas standing before the oven in the wall. He was asleep though, and Ezra took him by the shoulder and led him back to his bed. After which he returned to the disused oven. He drew forth from it a pipe, he had lost as mysteriously as Albert had lost his money, an ornament which, apparently, Albert had just placed there, seeing it had been in its accustomed place a few hours previously, and, last of all, Albert's bag of savings—intact.

Albert is a sleep-walker.

The old oven was cracked, Maria Whitmore explained to Susannah. "And I havn't used it since the landlord gave me a new stove. I had a liking for the old 'un, 'specially for the brass knob I shine up every week, so I wouldn't consent to the workmen taking it out and bricking up the hole. To think, Susannah, that old oven harboured Albert's money—to think o' him, the quietest and stiddiest o' lads, bein' a sleep-walker—wonders don't cease, do they?"

Susannah acknowledged they did not.

"But there, I ain't a blamin' o' the lad; he behaved well to me and Ezra, he did, when the money was lost. He never suspected us o' takin' it."

At this implied reproach, Susannah was overcome, and sobbed on Mrs. Whitmore's expansive bosom.

"Anyway, Albert h'aint taken up wie anybody else, as he might ha' done. And you couldn't ha' said anything if he had—the way you flouted him. Be it six Sundays you h'aint walked wie him?"

"Seven!" Susannah corrected.

Long before this, Susannah had heard the story from Albert himself. At six o'clock, when she unlocked the dairy door to admit him and his milk pails, she found him awaiting her. The first thing she knew was the money bag thrust into her hands, and, as she described it: "Albert starin' at me as solemn as a dazed owl in daylight."

"The money's found, Susannah!" he announced.

"'Deed, and I'm glad to hear it!" she returned.

"They were the first words we had spoke to each other for weeks, Miss."

"Who was the thief?" I asked him.

"Seems there warn't one. What would yer say if I told yer I walks in my sleep sometimes—arter eatin' pork for my supper, I think liklies. I hid the bag in Maria's ole oven, and Ezra discivered it. What shall us du now?"

Susannah can at any time dissolve into tears—even at six o'clock on a March morning. She threw herself weeping into Albert's arms—so she confessed.

Money found, lovers reconciled. There is no moral to this tale that I know of, only the gladness and heartiness that are as good as a moral to all stories that end happily.

"I shall hev the banns called on Sunday," Albert declared.

"No, and 'deed you won't!" Susannah cried, blushing and taken aback.

"If you means to marry me, the banns shall be put up the next Sunday that ever is—or never at all!" he said firmly.

Albert had never given a sign of being masterful before. Susannah liked him the better for it, and submitted cheerfully.

On Sunday we shall listen for this particular calling of banns, with not a little inward amusement and glee.

By the way, Susannah's fellow-servant—Adelaide—is, I should say, unique so far as farm house domestics go. She is a militant suffragist; she subscribes weekly to 'Votes for Women,' and is apparently well up in her subject. She is a serious-minded young woman, and I suppose has her aspirations and ambitions. Susannah has "no patience with her," and does not hesitate to say so. Adelaide looks down with lofty disdain upon Susannah, and also upon Albert Hylas. She so frightened her own young man with her militant views, that he turned tail and bolted. Since then, Adelaide is forlorn and solitary on Sunday afternoons. The pride of being the one suffragist in the parish is, however, ample compensation.

XXXII.

March, 17th.

I go light-heartedly through the days. I am conscious of a subtle satisfaction in spending them with one who is filling the one niche Heaven made for her to fill. It produces in me a serenity and harmony that is enviable. May Wartley impresses me as the only possible wife for the man who had the sense to choose her. It is difficult to picture her with any other environment than the Manor Farm, or without the babies, and the placid companionship of the elder Mrs. Wartley.

She stands for a good deal more, than at first acquaintance, she seems to stand for. She has the wisdom and the quiet sagacity that do not belong to book learning. She goes through life with a white soul. She does not lack character or colour, but her eyes are blind to much that dulls and smears.

She deeply interested Felix Harridon.

"There are profounder depths in her than she herself dreams of," he said once, and added: "If the occasion called, I do not think anyone could surprise her so much as herself."

It seems to me her tenderness for the world is the keynote of her character.

The story of her life is not uninteresting, I think you will say. Her home, before she married, was some ten miles from Pelton. The family consisted of her parents, herself, and two sisters. Like all brotherless women, she distinctly suffers from having lacked them during her childhood. She is the eldest, though from early days the handsome, vivacious Renée usurped the position. It was not easy, neither was it characteristic of May to assert herself. The youngest sister was a cripple from her birth. Thus, the one sister threw my little friend back into the recesses of her own sensitive soul; the other drew forth everything that was strong and tender in her.

John Wartley was often over at Leeways. It was taken for granted he was in love with Renée. In her own family circle it was understood she was not unfavourably disposed towards him. But John Wartley knew his own mind from the first. It was May he desired for his wife, and, when the time came, he told her so.

Even she had been deceived for a long while, and though she loved him, was prepared to see him choose Renée. Renée had a way of appropriating everyone, and everything. She was imperious, selfish, and above all things—jealous. Even at the supreme moment May was minded to sacrifice herself. Fate must have smiled. Anyway John Wartley showed her

plainly he wanted herself, or no one. He married her as quickly as he could, and brought her here.

Her parents still live. Her father, however, succeeded to a small entailed property, and left the neighbourhood in consequence. The cripple sister is more helpless as the years go by. But now and then she comes for a lengthened visit to the Manor Farm. Renée went on the stage, and since, has married a wealthy stockbroker. She has not forgiven her sister, and has not seen her since her marriage. It is said, her jealousy, not her affections, suffered. That is the story. It is not the ideal background I would have had as a setting for May Wartley. I suppose it was the necessary one for the making of her.

Felix once told her he saw in her—Miranda married.

But May (I wonder if I ever told you her husband adds another word to the name. He calls her May Blossom.) May laughed blissfully.

"Do you picture Miranda making butter, and jams, and pickles, and garments for small boys?" she asked.

"Why, certainly, all in good time, and Ferdinand weeding the garden, and looking after the bees—and eating the honey," he told her mischievously.

The elder Mrs. Wartley nodded her head approvingly, and thoroughly enjoyed the joke. John Wartley has never been seen to weed, and he has a particular dread of being stung by bees.

The time of the cawing of rooks is here. Rooks'

nests add nothing to the beauty of the naked trees, yet lives there one who could wish away those dark blots from the topmost branches? The noisy clamour of the old birds strikes some rejoicing chord in me.

In the old days, if Jacob had the felicity of acquiring goodly flocks and herds, it was left for David, the poet, to immortalize them in song and psalm. That is partly why I love the Psalms.

Shepherds have always interested me. It is picturesque to wear a smock, and carry a crook, and follow a flock. Just now, shepherds loom rather large in importance. It is the lambing season. These English shepherds camp out, at this time, in little wooden houses on wheels, and are about with their *pages* at all hours of night, as the ewes may require attention.

These night hours must count for something to these men, perhaps they help them to shape their lives in quiet orderliness. Isn't it lovely to know that the shepherd's helper, during the lambing season, is known as—'the shepherd's *page*?' I delighted to find the good old word thus in use.

John Wartley has given me some curious shepherds' lore and superstition. Many shepherds refuse to count their lambs until all are born. To name any definite number before that time presages ill luck. The most superstitious of his race, that John Wartley ever knew, was a man who, to propitiate some deity, lived night and day in the same shirt through the whole month the lambing season lasted, or longer, if it were protracted.

Here is an old rhyme, so old that none can tell to what the number refers.

"Said the Shepherd to his dog
Dog, dance thee.
I will bet a pint of wine,
If you will bet with me
There are neither more nor less
Than four and twenty."

The old English sheep dog is fit companion for the Hound of Heaven, but I did not know he had acquired the habit of betting.

Hugh Derston is less well than he was last week. I write this with mixed feelings. In my callow years I was taught that to wish anyone dead was paramount to a moral murder. I am not without conscience, but it is the wish of my heart to see Basil Cameron and Margaret Derston happy.

Margaret and Basil are doing their best to keep the obstacle alive, and the nurse is ably seconding them. Of course it means playing ninepins with their hopes. I picture to myself their inmost feelings. I fancy I know what my own would be under the circumstances, but I give them the credit for cherishing more estimable, and virtuous ones, than I could. Men and women are called upon to play strange parts, and I fancy the bond between them is so much a thing of understanding, so little a matter of words. This ordeal is Fate's testing and trying of them. It is the refiner's fire. It may have the making of tragedy in it.

Yesterday, I had in my hand a beautiful chalice of fifteenth century date. It was of beaten silver. It stood for long, patient handwork, and skill, and beauty. There are men and women like this artistic, true work—others just machine-made, moulded, not handwrought. Basil and Margaret are true and good to the core. It is worth while for them to pass through the refiner's fire, Keith—but it makes one hold one's breath while they endure it. In the years to come, perhaps, they will look back on this time, and be glad.

Hugh Derston does not mean to die if he can help it. And who is to blame him? Not Joan Cantley, because Joan Cantley knows if she were lying ill, with Spring on the doorstep, she would make desperate efforts to stay in this cheery old world. She would cheat Death if she could.

Occasionally, he becomes delirious, and babbles of racecourses and music halls ; or he is a wanderer, he is in San Francisco, at sea, or on a South Sea island, or what we may presume is such.

XXXIII.

March, 23rd.

Spring and the primroses have come! And they have brought—Felix. He has returned, not to finish that broken holiday, as he promised, but for a brief three days. He was offered a primrose picnic, you remember, and he means to have it, and thought it worth while to come a hundred miles for it. He is thin and pale, but cheery and mischievous. He lacks the old robustness, and I fear he has not shaken off the weakness he suffered from in December. It is a relief to be quit of the responsibility of Wilfred Skelton, which he has had all this time. Wilfred's brother arrived from the ends of the earth at this opportune season, and has taken the burden of Wilfred, his debts, his despair, and all his other assets, on himself.

The moment he was free, Felix determined upon an irresponsible, blissful three days (all he can spare) at the Manor Farm. He says when a man has reached forty-two it becomes his duty, once in a blue moon, to display a child's wilfulness, a boy's bravado, and a fool's folly, to show he has not left youth too far behind him.

You see from this the spirit in which we are to spend these three days. They are to be dear, foolish, happy days. The Manor Farm is just the right setting and background for them.

"You knew the primroses would bring me, Alec, boy?" he asked.

"I began to think they wouldn't!" Alec told him frankly.

"Don't you know I am a man of my word?"

When Alec is at a loss for an answer he changes the subject.

"Come and see my guinea pigs!" he said.

"Come, Joan!" Felix cried, and, with Sonny in my arms, we went out into the afternoon sunshine. And we went from one light-hearted occupation to another. We gathered up the eggs, and watched the bees coming home with little bags full of pollen on their legs. We scampered across a meadow to sail a boat on a pond, and we gathered cuckoo flower, and made a daisy chain, and went to see the lambs. It all sounds childish and ridiculous, but it wasn't so, really. It was Arcadian, and pastoral, and effervescent. And if we were happy, what does it matter how foolish it sounds? We *were* happy and jocund—jocund seems to me a veritable Spring adjective. I am glad I thought of it.

We were not in when the bats flew out, and the shadows, which a wise old full moon began to cast, were sharply defined. But it was Sonny's bed-time, and therefore, time to seek a roof over our silly heads.

What do you think of an afternoon like this for a sober, hard-working, and intellectual London publisher?

March 24th, 11 p.m. The primrose picnic is over.

I was last down to breakfast. Beside my plate lay a letter in Paul Elksmoor's handwriting. Instinctively, I looked at Felix as I took it up. He smiled, and I knew he had recognised from whom it came. It was a frank, manly letter. Paul wants me to tell him that he need not give up hope ; that I will reconsider that decision of nine months ago. He is a dear soul who does not think half enough of himself. He is far too modest and unassuming. It is like this, I fear, Keith. He is lover, I am only friend. I don't want a one-sided marriage like that. The soul's pilgrimage is hard enough, without complicating the material life more than necessary. Let me wait. I love leisure—that is why I am here.

Would I, if I could, love as Richard Marshall and Ruby Cameron love? Frankly, no. To begin with, I could not. To end with, I desire something left of me for other things. Yet I do want to feel genuine devotion for the man I marry. I might make a little confession at this stage, but I won't. Perhaps you are not blind enough to need it.

Well! let's get to the primrose picnic. Felix consulted Alec confidentially, as to where it should be. But I clinched the matter by saying there was only one spot in England, where it could possibly be, and that was the Beech Wood that brought me to Pelton.

Someone had suggested a more delicately dainty place, a copse of silver birches with primroses growing between. Yes! it is a lovelier setting than my noble old Beech Wood, as you can see, if you draw the two mental pictures ; but I wanted a place of memories for my picnic.

We had to carry bread, and jam, and cakes, and a tea-basket, or Alec would not have recognised the relationship of this to other picnics. We sat on a fallen tree to eat, and we were forced to boil the kettle with methylated spirit because all the sticks we gathered were wet and green. We picked our primroses ; we looked for the Babes in the Wood, and the home of the Three Bears. We found a couple of thrushes' nests, and three blackbirds'. We imperilled our boots to get marsh marigolds out of a watery swamp, and we positively waded to look into a water hen's nest.

We were just little pigmies at the feet of the great tree trunks.

" You and I will remember this picnic to our hoariest years, Alec ! " Felix said solemnly.

They had just stood, each with one of my hands, and pulled me out of a quagmire of stickfast mud.

Once, Felix gathered a little bunch of primroses and ivy sprigs, and held them towards me.

" I want you to be happy, my dear Joan ! " he said quizzically. I thought wistfully too.

The intuitive mimicry of childhood made Alec also pick a little bunch of primroses and ivy sprigs, and

make me an offering of them, with the identical words Felix had used.

I held the two bunches, and we laughed uproariously. It is not every action that will bear being duplicated, nor every sentence.

I am sure Felix was thinking of that letter I had had in the morning ; perhaps he would have mentioned Paul Elksmoor. After the little comedy—he did not.

"Shall we build a hut and live in this wood, you and me and Miss Cantley?" Alec asked, as he stood at Felix' knee as he sat on the felled tree. "I could bring my guinea pigs for company if we *was* lonely."

"Unfortunately this does not happen to be a desert island upon which you, and I, and Miss Cantley have been cast. If it were, it would be the right thing to do, and we could have a glorious open-air life, fishing and hunting to keep the larder going. Pity circumstances alter cases, isn't it, my boy?" Felix' lips twitched.

"Life would be a prolonged picnic. There would be no books to get through the press ; no hat shops for Miss Cantley, and no tailors for you and me. Alec, was it wise to direct my thoughts to magic channels of delight such as these?"

He sighed with mock profundity.

"There wouldn't be any lessons for me. I think we had better build that hut. You could make me a bow, and arrows, couldn't you? and I'd buy some marbles—we could play marbles mostly all day. And

you could have a gun and a catapult—a catapult is what I want too."

Alec was deliciously exercised with his idea.

"A crossbow, and marbles, a gun, and more than all, a catapult—better and better. Do you know they are magic words, words to conjure with, boy?" Felix asked.

Alec could not understand grown-up fooling. I delight in Felix when he is in such a mood.

"Do you think Miss Cantley would like life in a hut in a wood—no shops, no baker, no postman, no train to take her to London?"

"I should think she would *love* it," Alec said vehemently.

It was time to return.

"Primrose picnics are not to be compared to orthodox garden parties!" Felix remarked reflectively.

"I return from garden parties bored ; I return from primrose picnics rejuvenated !" I declared.

Felix took off his cap and let the soft air flow over his brow.

"And the day after to-morrow I shall be in the fat oiliness of London."

Our primrose picnic was over.

March 25th. My letter becomes a veritable diary for you this week, *mon cher*. It shows I think of you each day, and long to tell you in spoken words what I can only paint inadequately. Swelling leaf buds, expanding leaves, flowers—little wind flowers,

violets, daisies, and our primroses are everywhere. Each day is a birthday for some of the young spring things. Scarcely a morning passes that I do not hear the laughing, mocking call of the green woodpecker, and from my bed I watch the starlings—one or two, and sometimes three fly into the bare tree branches so that I have grown familiar with their intimate, jaunty ways—airing their wings as they sit, and uttering sibilant, meditative noises unlike other birds.

John Wartley tells me, soon we shall have the wryneck with us. Nobody calls him by that name—to all and sundry he is—"the Cuckoo's Mate." It is a joyful thing to have birds in the foreground. Just now they voice the exultant mood of nature—her ecstasy of joy.

I loved this afternoon. It brought a delicately beautiful episode.

With time and patience I have managed to recover the medals Corporal Barker sold to give extra comforts to his sister's husband. I received them this morning, for they had been sold, and resold. Later, Felix and May Wartley, with your humble servant, took them to the cottage.

I thought to make a simple little ceremony to amuse the sick man and the patient sister. I asked Corporal Barker to stand up, which he did, and saluted. I proceeded to pin, one after the other, the four medals on the proud old breast. The sight of them almost took his breath away.

"To think—ever to think I should hev 'em again!"

he kept muttering, fairly bewildered with astonishment.

He wanted to thank me, and to show his gratitude. But he just couldn't. He tried, but his lips quivered. He left us, and went out into the sunshine.

"James be overcome, Miss. He never thought of settin' eyes on 'em agin," the sister said brokenly, and even the querulous, hard face of her husband softened.

We were going out at one door, when the old hero came in by the other.

"I shall never forget yer kindness to the old man. I pray, aye and I will pray the Almighty to bless yer, Miss," he said earnestly.

I bowed my head. It seemed to me a lovely thing to know God was to be asked to bless me.

On our return to the Manor Farm garden, we came upon Alec throwing stones into the branches of an oak tree, with a robust over-arm movement.

Felix stopped.

"Good—amazingly good. That is a sight to appeal to any man."

He looked at me.

"To save your life you could not throw a stone in that fashion. It is the essentially masculine action. Look!"

To-morrow morning Felix goes back to London.

He asked to read the manuscript of my book so far as it goes. He was in the mood to be easily pleased, and foretold I should never write anything so good again. His charitable verdict runs:

I go with my theme. That a book which can conjure visions of saffron sunsets, and green meadows, and sheepfolds ; of ploughs and slow horses, of cottage wives and working men, should appeal to a man's subconscious being, as well as to his imagination. That which was from remote ages is still his heritage. It still awakens, pictures, listens when it is stirred. It is what he hopes my modest book may do—nothing more—just stir the old sleeping primeval sense in a modern reader. He says if it do that—and he honestly thinks it will—I may be more than satisfied. You see to what I am to aspire—dare I hope to achieve? It is the *leit motif* of my modest work.

"Joan!" he said whimsically. "Body, soul and spirit you must be in robust health—it's all sane, wholesome, and level-headed."

I laughed.

"It is not the outcome of temperament so much as of atmosphere. You would not have me write of crowded ballrooms, of society scandal, of society functions and doings—at the Manor Farm?"

"No!" he said, "a thousand times no!"

But I have not gone deep enough. I have not realized sufficiently things I ought to have probed—yet what I could, I have humbly attempted. It is all indistinct and afar off, but it is sincere.

XXXIV.

March, 30th.

I SUPPOSE all my grown-up life I have expected the news your letter contained. You have found her—the one woman in the world for you. Love, if it be deep, sincere and passionate is a great illuminator. You have grown smaller—and bigger—in your own eyes, and you are humbler, and yet prouder than before love took possession of you. You are living in a magic circle. I am writing by this mail a letter to your—one woman. She will like what I shall write. As the critical, prospective sister-in-law, I may say I am glad she has a good old-standing name—Katherine Elizabeth. I repeat the words gratefully. A few days ago, I read the list of Court presentations—the debutantes were Doreens, Dorises, Eileens, Irises and so forth. Whatever a girl may be, I do not like her name to be sickly with mere prettiness, and have no old and splendid associations.

How am I to put into words the wishes and yearnings I have for you? Utter joy and content, utter accord and sympathy with each other, the gladness of happiness, the greatness of serenity—and love—these

are what I wish you both. Your description of Katherine is delicious and piquant—'a noble damsel who dances with her feet, and wears a halo round her head.'

I fear my letter, and previous ones too, must be tame compared to the mood in which you read them. There is much happiness and amusement in my present environment. I love its atmosphere—you too, I am assured, would appreciate it. I think Katherine would also—if she be what I imagine her to be.

Hugh Derston was better last week. This week he is not so well. He is restricted in the amount of drugs he takes, and suffers from it, as all morphia victims do. The strain tells on Margaret. She is careworn and pale. Basil Cameron, with duty his fetish, does not spare her. "Do what you can for him," is his insistent cry. She does what she can. I can't help admiring Basil Cameron for the way he has come through this trying time. A man may be a slave to his notion of duty, but you respect him for it, and admire him. He is doing his level best to bring Hugh Derston to health again, or, let us say, comparative health, for he is a human wreck—so it is said.

At the invitation of Mrs. Marshall I have been present at a 'Mother's Meeting.' Thirty mothers of all ages disposed themselves round the vicarage room, with bags, cottons, and garments in all stages of incompleteness. Sitting near to me were Susan

Noll and Widow West. It is a curious fact that some people are known to outsiders by their Christian names from christening to death—others drop them, at any rate on their marriage. Seemingly my neighbours represented both classes.

Susan Noll is a big woman with a kindly understanding face, and a twinkling eye that betokens a sense of humour. Widow West is a quiet little body, inoffensive, but with it all, well able to hold her own. A grave discussion was started between them, as to the causes remote and otherwise of—'a stroke.'

It was a big subject, but their experience was profound. Widow West explained for my benefit that her man had been paralyzed and helpless for ten years before his death.

In my innocence I asked the cause of the stroke.

Susan Noll sighed. Widow West hesitated. Then she cheerfully set herself to tell me the story.

"It were a fit of anger. Ter be a dangerous matter, Miss, with some constitutions to git too angry, and my William, bein' ginger haired was werry passionate, warn't he, Susan?"

Susan acquiesced readily.

"Ginger haired men are most allus fiery!" she said.

"We kep the shop in them days," Widow West continued. "And we had our goods wholesale from the town. One day, the man who supplied us sent in a bill for a cart load o' things after they had been properly paid for. When he sees the bill come in a

second time, my William thought the man was after gettin' the better of him. He put the horse i' the cart, and druv away a'most too angered to speak except for cursin'. But he settled the matter, and was satisfied it was but a mistake and quite unintentional. Then he druves home—sixteen mile ter be. The old horse turned into the yard clumsy-like. I was on the look-out, and I was quick to see, nobody wasn't controllin' him. My William set on the seat as helpless as a child. Bill Quales and Dick Hart had to lift him down and carry him to his bed. He never left it no more till the coffin claimed him."

"A rare warnin', Miss, ain't it?" Susan Noll asked with gusto.

"There's many warnins, if we be but wise enough to take 'em as such!" Widow West acknowledged placidly.

"Susan had an Aunt took much as my husband was!"

Thus did Widow West lead the said Susan gracefully to keep the ball rolling. Susan took the hint.

"Yes!" she said. "It was my Aunt Hannah Greenfield. She married agin her parents' wishes, she did—and you could never rightly say she was a happy woman. She had two boys. One was a stiddy lad, but the other was a waster, and he enlisted. Pity he didn't get send abroad, but he didn't, and he was allus awritin' to his mother for money. It warn't likely his parents should give to the likes o' him, especially as they hadn't got it to give.

"My Aunt bore it as long as she could, but the day came she was that upset and angered, she puts the letter on the fire and she says:

"'I'm goin' to London. I'm goin' this very day, and I'm goin' to see that there boy o' mine, the young rascal, and give him a piece o' my mind.'

"She flustered about; she wouldn't even put on her best bonnet, and she got herself down to the station and off by the ten o'clock train. I see her off myself, white and shakin' wie rage, and callin' the lad all the ugly names she could think on.

"It's tellin' yer the truth, I am, Miss. She was struck i' the train, and she was carried speechless to the horspital. 'Twas a sad thing, and no mistake. She never spoke agin, and in a few days she was a corpse. Ah! my dear Miss, there couldn't be no more solemn warnin' than that."

Take heed, Keith. I have warned you—beware of excessive anger, my friend, ponder the dire results that may accrue.

The mothers departed in due time. After they had gone the vicar appeared.

"I hope the village mothers impressed you!" he said whimsically.

I told him Widow West had especially taken my fancy.

"Widow West!" he repeated. "I too have been singing her praises this afternoon. Guess to whom!"

It did not strike me that he was driving at anything particularly.

"It dawned upon me, some days ago, she would make an excellent wife for a certain lonely old man—if the lonely old man could be made to realize the potent fact."

"Davy Snow!" I cried. Light had suddenly broken in upon me.

Mr. Marshall nodded.

"It was a delicate task, possibly outside my province. But I thought I would do what I could, and may Heaven forgive me if I acted as an interfering old busybody. I approached the matter as diplomatically as I knew how."

"How did he take it?" I asked delighted.

"I suggested the house missed 'Liza, and was in a deplorable state. Davy admitted it sadly, and went so far as to say that if she were in a position to see this dust and dirt she must be grieving sorely—'lor, lor,' he muttered, 'she ain't enjoyin' of herself if she happen to see her furnitoor neglected.'"

The vicar loves the dialect.

He went on to tell me that he had assured Davy, 'Liza would like him to be comfortable.

"I made a strong point of choosing a quiet, gentle body who would keep 'Liza's things as she would like to have them kept. Finally, I suggested what a neat, comfortable little woman was Widow West. It almost took his breath away, and certainly his power of speech, for the time being. He sat and stared at me. I came away and left him to digest it."

"I am not sure that I gave you credit for so much

circumspection, Anthony," Mrs. Marshall said indulgently, "but certainly you are premature. He has not mourned for 'Liza six months yet. It is early days to think of taking a second wife. Next Michaelmas—in time for Widow West to give notice to quit her cottage—would have been suitable and fitting!"

"You fail to realize the case, Augusta. You always do when you do not make allowances for circumstances."

But Augusta, dear lady, would not admit herself wrong.

"Anything else you have done this afternoon?" she asked.

"Well!" he said, "I talked to old Joshua Noll, and for some reason or another I had occasion to use the word—humbug.

"The old fellow straightened himself—he was sowing barley on his five-acre patch—and he grunted.

"'Isn't it true, isn't it humbug?' I asked.

"He scratched his head.

"'Them as use that word is *cheatin' the devil*,' he said, emphatically and scornfully. ''Tis used by them as dusn't be heard aswearin'. It's cheatin' the devil.'"

The lady looked shocked.

"Such things ought not to amuse you, Anthony," she said severely.

"One day you shall hear the story of Joshua Noll's five-acre patch!" he remarked to me.

He drew a wry face.

"My wife wearies of a tale she has heard me repeat too many times. I have to study consideration for her feelings," he laughed.

XXXV.

April, 5th.

PELTON is distressed and agitated. A tragedy has been enacted in our midst. When horror, and a painful excitement lay hold of a community, the very atmosphere seems to partake of the tenseness. The minds of all are exercised on this one theme, and it is threshed out in all its bearings.

I have told you in my letters of the farmer who was deprived, by the powers that be, of a portion of his farm, and gave up the rest of his own accord. It was considered an unwise step, but he could not get above the trouble and worry this loss was to him. He was a hard working, industrious man, who laboured early and late with but little of the sinews of war at his command—yet he worked cheerfully and would have continued doing so, if the land had not been taken from him. The trouble came, and he could not stand up to face it.

This winter he has been seeing his crops out. His last grain has been threshed and sold within the week.

One of his boys, with white anxious face, came to the Manor Farm before breakfast to ask if anything

had been seen of his father. He had not been home since seven o'clock the previous evening. John Wartley went back with the boy. A search was made. They went down to the farm premises that had been given up last Michaelmas, and they found him—shot through the head.

He left a letter for his wife, a pitiful, tragic letter, saying his life was a failure ; and he could not see how he was to make it anything else. He told how he was broken and bitter in spirit, and he hoped she would not blame him.

Blame him, Keith ! poor body, she sat there stunned and tearless, and little children of all ages gathered round, scared and cowed.

" It isn't his fault ! " she moaned, and repeated it over and over again. " All the winter, when he was half beside himself with the trouble, I feared this. But, with the Spring coming—I thought—I thought." She shuddered, and then the sobs came—at last.

She is a quick-witted, imaginative woman, and her brain works clearly and vividly. She pictured the agony of mind he must have suffered. Neither is she nor was her husband educated folk, yet both had a refinement of mind and manners.

" It was the land trouble almost turned his brain," she muttered with drawn lips.

I took the three younger children for the afternoon —two little girls and a boy. It is of all things pathetic to have to do with frightened, trembling children. I took them for a walk, and then brought

them to the Manor Farm for tea and stories. We gathered nosegays.

The boy would not pick primroses. He shook his head.

"Daddy liked to see 'em growin'," he whispered huskily.

Basil Cameron was with the woman when I took the children home at bedtime.

He had been, I think, talking quietly to her. She had regained the mastery and control of herself.

He rested his hand on her shoulder, as he rose to depart.

"You are going to be an extraordinarily brave woman!" he said. "More than ever, your boys and girls need a mother with real grit in her. You understand—don't you?"

This Basil Cameron has a wonderful magnetic power in him.

A glimmer of a brave smile, infinitely sad, played round her lips.

"Sir!" she said, with a gentle dignity. "I will not stop short of my utmost."

One of the children—the youngest—hung round her neck, whispering tearfully.

"Want him, my pretty? Ay, I know you do," the mother answered.

It was all simple and touching. There was a greatness, a freedom from all artificial sentimentality, that caught at one's heart strings.

"She is a good woman. She will rise to what is

required of her," Basil Cameron said, as we walked back by the short cut through the fields, and he added: "This is the climax to a year and a half of hideous anxiety. She confessed as much. She has a fine spirit. She will not be daunted. I know all her family. They have brains and stamina."

"Much is required of her," I said.

"She has—much to give," he answered.

"This rejoicing Spring setting makes it doubly tragic!" burst from me.

There were young green leaves on the briers, and the willows had broken their leaf buds. There were little Spring noises, and triumphant birds' songs all about me.

"I don't know!" he said meditatively; "to my mind the ceaseless brooding is the keynote of the tragedy."

Margaret Derston was coming forth from the cottage hospital as we passed, and she told the doctor her husband was worse. He went in.

Ruby Cameron has returned home for a brief while. She has come to talk over with her mother and brother the desirability of a quiet wedding in town. There is so much in its favour, considering her broken engagement to Bob, that I think they will accede. The date is rather a moot point. She does not want anything to take Richard Marshall's mind from his work, and his coming examination.

She and I have had a long talk. Now that she has time and quietude of mind to review the situation,

she is lost in the wonder of it. If ever a woman has found herself—it is Ruby Cameron. She might have gone through the whole gamut of her years, merely the woman I described to you when first I came here. You would not recognise her from that description any longer. She is a bigger souled, a nobler minded being. She is very humble.

"I know few may love as we do. If I had more worldly wisdom, I might understand. As it is, it is far beyond me. But I know I am changed. All that is me is awake now—qualities I did not know I possessed, have roused from slumber.

"Richard and I talk very little of our love for each other!" she continued quietly.

She does not rhapsodise. The whole thing is too deep and soul-stirring for that. Mind you, when she became engaged to Bob Ingleby, I doubt not she wrote pages of rapture to her bosom friends.

She is almost too happy to be joyful, if you know what I mean. Basil is very gentle towards her in these days. I feel sure he has all through understood something of the intensity of her love, compared with anything she felt for Bob Ingleby—aye, and compared with what many women feel for the men they marry.

XXXVI.

April, 12th.

High spirits, Spring in the air, sunshine, a six mile drive, with the Hunt Steeplechases at the end of them —these things were sufficient, surely, to tune the day to a glad key on an Easter Monday morning.

Only anxiety as to what may befall Bob ever takes Margaret Derston to witness these races. This year, of course, she remained with her husband. She confesses she makes herself miserable, days before, anticipating evil. She confesses, too, that the relief when they are over, and Bob sound in wind and limb, is great enough to afford something like compensation. She is not spiritless nor tame, but she lacks enthusiasm for sport. Such women rarely figure in fiction—the Dianas are more attractive to the millions.

Bob is sporting to the soles of his boots. He had three races to ride that day.

At the last moment, John Wartley was unable to go, and Bob Ingleby drove May and myself.

"Tell us your experience of racing, Joan," he said as we bowled along.

"Ascot!" I told him.

His lips twitched.

"You should not have come. Shall I turn round and take you home?" he laughed.

I tried to explain that I was tingling with the spirit and excitement of expectation, that I was enjoying, and meant to enjoy, every passing moment, and yearning to carry off the picture of each race for mental recall through long years to come.

May listened smiling. She has not the capacity for irresponsible enjoyment, not the high spirits, levity, shall I call it, of your humble servant.

Bob's gee was as gay as ourselves. He shied on reasonable occasions, danced a jig at the approach of an ugly traction engine, stepped short—you know the mincing ways of his kind—then flashed past. And when there was no excuse for excitement, was as steady as an old roadster.

Bob Ingleby, 'the best horseman in the county,' was to ride his own old Blue Roan in the first race. He was entered as 'aged' and Bob declares he is the only bit of good horse flesh he ever possessed.

In due time we arrived—and the time for the race approached. I wanted to taste all the joy of the exciting moments. There was a large entry, and all the riders were members of the hunt.

You know the old childish trick of willing your favourite to win. I sat there, with cold feet, and hot spirits, and under my breath I cried:

"Win, Blue Roan—win, win. You'll win. You *must* win!"

When they passed us, the Blue Roan ran second.

I heard everything in that wild moment—the thud of hoof on grass, the creak of leather, the clink of metal—noises that were scarcely noises, I distinguished and placed. The next round Bob led, and we were in sight of the winning post. The horses finished in a bunch, but the Blue Roan won. Moments of suspense such as those are worth half a life time of the orthodox kind, but it is a good thing they are only moments.

I think the Blue Roan knew he had done a meritorious thing, for he really looked proud and elate, or I fancied he did.

In the second race, Sir Samuel Reid was running a magnificent coal black hunter. Bob was round again with us, and we followed the horses with breathless interest. It was taken wholly for granted that Sir Samuel's horse must carry all before him. He failed. He fell foul of the water jump and lost the race. Two horses had been running him close, and they finished a dead heat—there was not half a neck between them, not a nose.

Bob rode again in the third race, and only six horses started. His horse was not his own this time. There was a tenseness of feeling, a sense of suppressed excitement, I had not noticed markedly before. The crowds were dead silent all along the course. The horses flashed past us, Bob on the bay mare well to

the front. There came a long-drawn exclamation, a kind of subdued roar among the concourse of people ; again the horses passed us. Bob was not there. His horse was galloping riderless with the rest.

"Ingleby's come to grief!" I heard muttered below me—and now the moments of suspense were black and hideous. And then we heard—"He has been carried into the tent, but there are no bones broken."

I do not know what I should have done. I had risen to my feet. Common sense, however, returned; probably a doctor was overhauling him. And anyhow it was not for me to claim a right to minister to my old comrade.

Suddenly, I saw Basil Cameron making for us.

"There is nothing to worry over. He is game to ride number five," he said.

"Don't let him," I entreated ; "surely he is not fit!"

Basil Cameron smiled.

"I should stop him if I were able. He will not be stopped." And presently Bob himself joined us.

"Not ride!"

He echoed my words laughing.

"I am riding Will Harper's 'Druid,' and—just between you and me—I mean to win."

Even a sense of duty to Margaret ceased to urge me to plead after that. Bob was in a determined mood.

It was to me a long, long while before the fifth race was run. It was evidently *the* race of the day. There

was some trouble at starting, but nine horses were well away. The course was less good than it had been, but there was not a horse that did not run gamely.

It was a brave, gallant race—I must use just those adjectives. Then—at one of the fences came a bad spill.

The Druid led, gave place to Saracen, led again, fell third. But the Druid was the favourite.

There were cries of—"Go it, Ingleby!"

At the water jump I shut my eyes for a moment, but it was grandly taken, not a mishap, and I opened them again to see the last three horses take it.

I do not think I could have spoken, scarcely could I have moved.

The Druid led again.

Bob sat low in the saddle, his head forward, along his horse's neck. He had not sat thus in the previous races.

Horses thundered by.

Would the noise of horses' hoofs on grass never stop? My eyes were strained.

"Ingleby wins—the Druid wins." They fairly shouted it.

Bob led by a length—more. But as he drew past the winning post, he failed to pull up his horse. Others ran forward, and he was hauled out of the saddle—unconscious—or almost so. That spill of the previous race was claiming its own. There was hubbub and confusion, and Bob was again carried off the course.

Basil Cameron sent us a message. Bob was con-

scious, and there was no need for anxiety. He had ridden his race with a badly damaged shoulder.

You can imagine the excitement, the enthusiasm, and all that people said when this became known.

It was the last race, and people left the course reiterating the cry that passed from lip to lip—"Well done, Bob Ingleby."

Steeplechases do not as a rule need a hero, do they, for their successful issue? This year they had one—and the tide of emotion swept tumultuously through the crowd. This race had stirred something deeper than the sense of sport in men's hearts.

Basil Cameron himself motored Bob home, so that Margaret had received him, and heard what there was to hear, before we saw her.

Many people came to May and offered to drive us home. I expected her to accept gladly. She, however, did the surprising and unexpected thing.

She said very quietly that there was no need. She could quite well drive herself. And she did, with fine, confident horsemanship.

I had never supposed her capable of driving anything but the staid and ancient pony. It was a sidelight I would not willingly have missed.

Have I pictured May Wartley as a meek woman? You do not associate a meek woman with the driver of a spirited horse, unaccustomed to a woman's hand.

The surprise of the unexpected thrilled me. I was full of admiration, envy and delight.

Bob is better. He will not take his hurt seriously.

XXXVII.

April, 17th.

KEITH, dear, I want to begin in the middle and tell you my chiefest news. But I won't do that. I will keep to the 'narrative' style. Everybody thinks it was splendid of Bob Ingleby to ride that final race, and nobody has left off talking of it yet. You meet a body, and the body immediately comments on it, and all and sundry say nobody else would have had the pluck. It is an enviable sensation to feel proud of your friend! One says he did it because he did not want to disappoint young Will Harper, whose horse he was riding. Another says: "What Bob Ingleby says he'll do—he'll do."

We women-kind remark that it is a merciful thing Margaret Derston was not there. The village is delighted with him.

I heard one old man exclaim succinctly.

"Master Bob would ride acrost the sea to Ameriky if he could find anything to ride on!"

And old Davy says caustically:

"Mister Ingleby would ride a witch's broom rather than not ride at all."

Tom Priestly walked over seven miles to enquire for him—Sir Samuel Reid has taken Tom on the Walton estate since the shooting season ended—which is by way of being promotion. Tom can never be sufficiently grateful for what Bob did when he was in trouble.

"Look 'er, Miss," he said to me one afternoon, a day or two after the races. "There ain't another gentleman in the county can hold a candle to Mr. Bob—no, nor never will!"

Of course there are those who declare—"it was a foolhardy thing to do."

One or two old croakers say: "It shows he has more pluck than common sense."

And if that be an obvious fact, surely it is a more blessed thing to have *pluck* than common sense. The local papers took this view of the case, and wrote in glowing and enthusiastic terms concerning his achievement.

In the meantime, Bob has been sent to bed and kept there, by the doctor's stringent orders. But he is progressing well, and declares he will be downstairs no later than to-morrow.

Now I come to the news that is pressing upon me.

Yesterday morning, Sir Samuel and Lady Sybil Reid rode over to enquire for Bob. I happened to have walked back from the Cottage Hospital with Margaret. She was just going to rest after having been up with her husband most of the night, and she

asked me to go down in her place and report on Bob's progress.

Lady Reid is really a charming woman.

When I introduced myself, she smiled and said:

"I know all about you. You are a friend of a friend of mine—Felix Harridon." She paused a moment and then added—"poor Felix!"

"Why poor?" I asked.

"It's human nature to call a friend 'poor' when he is in a nursing home—and especially when he is making such a desperate fight for health as Felix is," she said quietly.

"In a nursing home—Felix Harridon!" I exclaimed.

"In December—when he came down to us—before he went over to the Manor Farm, the specialist did not give much for his life, and told him so. He has gone to this nursing home, not because he is worse, but for special treatment. He wrote to my husband about three weeks ago, before he went there, and said that the incentive to get sound again was great enough to make him strive his utmost. The last report—three or four days ago—is to the effect that he is making real progress."

Then Sir Samuel began discussing Bob Ingleby's ride and his pluck, and I answered, and talked, and said all the conventional things I was called upon to say. I was thankful when they went and left me alone with leisure to think.

I walked back to the Manor Farm pondering it all.

Felix must have gone straight from our primrose picnic to this nursing home, and never a word of it had he said to me. I thought I understood more clearly that mood he had maintained those three days. It had been too consistently maintained to be natural.

At Christmas time, too, there had been things which had puzzled me. His life was worth little, and he knew it, but I didn't.

Why didn't he tell me, Keith? You and I are old friends. He might have told me. Why did he wish me to remain ignorant? Last night I thought I would go back to London. I did not think I could stay longer at the Manor Farm.

I have to smile at my own attitude. What am I to Felix Harridon? What does it matter to him if I am in London, or if I am at Pelton? That longing to go was the restlessness of the anxiety which has filled me. It had to be conquered. I am making up my mind if I shall write and tell him I know how it is with him. So far, I feel inclined to write one of my usual sort of letters, and say nothing of what I have heard.

Just remember, Felix is our dear old friend—and he might have died suddenly. He is better now—much better.

To show you I can get outside myself and my worrying, I will tell you of a country sale I attended last week.

Four days beforehand, the notice of the sale hung on the garden door of an old house between here and

Callowham. An ancient recluse had died, and everything in the house was to be sold.

I was out on the Great Auk just as the sale commenced, and the spirit of curiosity led me to stable the horse, and see and hear what was to be seen and heard at a country sale.

I found it to be a supreme field for observation of human nature. I gleaned curious insight into character. I gloated over sparklets of homely wit, and observed expressions of various faces with delight.

A Commentary in two great volumes was up for sale, and hung in the balance for the single bid of one shilling.

A voice cried: "There be the brains o' the Bible there!"

The result was three more brisk bids, and it went for five shillings.

A picture, a woodland scene, was displayed.

"Shillin'," cried one.

"Eighteen pence," bid another. Then it hung fire.

"Must be two pounds o' paint on it," someone remarked encouragingly.

It had its weight, had this remark.

"I'll hev a oil painting to my name, I'll be hanged if I won't—two bob."

The cheery workman obtained it at that.

Some old china sold well, and also some Chippendale furniture.

There was to me a poignant note of pathos when a handsome old silver blotter was held up, and dis-

played the *used* blotting paper within. Someone should have removed it. The sight of it held up to strangers was too intimate, too familiar. Often the veriest trifle grips us.

A small lot of odds and ends, a cheap vase or two, and a blue china teapot were put up almost at the end.

"Shillin'," was bid.

There were some dealers present, and bidding was taken up in earnest. Eight guineas was reached, and the lot fell.

I watched the faces of the villagers—curiosity, wonder, bewilderment, amazement, almost disbelief in their own sense of hearing. Staccato remarks were uttered breathlessly.

"I thought Jesse Bell would ha' paid well for it wie that shillin' he bid," said one.

"What do they think they are abuyin'?" said another scornfully.

"Must ha' lost their senses!" concluded another.

"Seven."

"Seven ten."

"Eight."

"Guineas."

"Eight guineas." It fell at that.

They had nothing left to say. They were dumbfounded.

The little powder blue teapot was the treasure trove.

The sale ended. The hustle and bustle of removal of purchases began. Things that had lived cheek by jowl for many decades were separated for ever. I still

lingered. I had bought a beautiful little Sheraton looking-glass.

The house grew emptier of its belongings. As I went out of the gate a man passed me with the very door scrapers. He made jest with another bearing away a set of fire irons in one hand, and a roll of drab drugget in the other.

The whole thing was dramatic and simple. I would not have missed it for a good deal.

Another broad, ample work is proceeding. The root crop is being sown. Field workers are sowing mangels—and for mangels they dress the soil with salt. So goes the story of my wonderful year, and I come ever nearer to the wide, clear story of Life. Salt—somehow, the Bible mention of salt, glorifies it, and puts upon it an enchanted value, or rather makes us realize its value. Out in the fields, they lay a bit of rock salt for the sheep to lick. It is wholesome, and good for them. Even a fact like that, somehow, grips my heart. Our material life, the life of the body, human and beast, has been so richly thought out by a Master mind.

XXXVIII.

April, 23rd.

Before I wrote my letter to Felix there came one from him, full of news, full of very excellent spirits, and full of what may be bravado. He writes again of a day when he and I are to turn trippers and trip to the sea.

"It is going to beat our primrose picnic hollow—red letter day though that has been to me ever since," he writes, and says he is feeling fit again, and I am not to picture him—"pale, pinched, and breathless" any longer.

And with the letter came a great box of pale Neapolitan violets. The house, in consequence, is violet scented. Felix always had a way of knowing one's favourite flowers. He tells me, too, he is writing to you by this mail; among other things he wants to congratulate you.

I am reassured. I am glad Lady Reid told me what she did, but I do honestly think Felix is better than he was.

Bob Ingleby is off the sick list practically, and very much himself again.

I begin to understand the real significance of such words as pastoral. To-day, I came upon groups of field workers who might have been posed for some noble picture. I believe, and I am happy in believing, I see pictorially and decoratively very often. Had you seen my groups and their settings as I saw them, your heart would have thrilled. I see farther into the true inwardness of living as I learn more clearly to recognise a wider, broader life. I have learned what worship is.

It is the Spring of all the Springs I ever lived.

Yet for all this, since the morning, the wind has shifted north. It is cold, biting, penetrating ; it is the blackthorn Winter, which is a new fact to me, and a cold one.

I have gathered angular branches of blackthorn. There is a Chinese bowl in the house which makes blossom on bare branches seem the only thing that ever should go into it. Were it mine, I would gravely dedicate it to such blossom.

Different people have taken the trouble to tell me I get a surprising amount of sheer gladness from trifles. People so widely different as Paul, and Bob Ingleby, and Barbara, and Mrs. Marshall, among others—and Felix oftener than any.

The great thing is to get gladness—and if trifles yield it to me, I am to be envied.

Lately, farm handicrafts have given it to me in quite considerable measure. The other day, I found myself enjoying the skill and decorativeness of a haytrusser.

He stood, a hoary old man of many moons, among his regular sized trusses, his glittering blade glinting in the sunlight.

"The haytrusser," I repeated, as if I liked the sound of the word. I did. It meant a grave, sober, human poem fraught with quiet dignity. Hay trussing is not done by anyone, told off at a moment's notice to do it. It is one particular man's daily work, so long as hay is to be cut. His whole body heaves to the movement of his steel blade. It is hard, slow work, and he knows it, and accepts it cheerfully. Someone must do it—why not he?

There are evidently stern limitations in the naming of farm horses.

In an old sale catalogue of John Wartley's grandfather, printed sixty-five years ago, appear such names as 'Short,' 'Scrat,' 'Smiler,' 'Dragon,' 'Ball,' 'Ratler,' 'Dapper,' 'Beauty.' These names are perpetuated on the Manor Farm to this day.

The language I hear addressed to these farm horses is after this fashion:

"Way whish cup wo' holt,"

or again:

"Way whish cup hardy."

From one or other of these sentences the horses know whether to turn to the right or left.

Etiquette is faithfully observed on the farm. Starting out, or returning from work, is strictly in order of precedence. Likewise, the first team goes to the pond to drink before the second, the second

before the third and fourth. All this makes for orderliness, for quiet dignity, and general peacefulness.

April 24th. Hugh Derston died this morning. Down on his luck, poor specimen though he was, he clung desperately to life. Whatever he thought the future held out for him, his reiterated cry became—he did not want to 'shuffle out.' I do not suppose the man could do anything heroically, certainly not die heroically. Basil Cameron did all that could be done, and Margaret was with him when he died. She had sat up three nights in succession, and the end came quite quietly. Poor flotsam of humanity—this Hugh Derston has my sympathy. I can never withhold that from life's failures.

What is the power which holds some back from much of the folly of life, and goads others towards it? A different power you say. It is to be hoped so. When death comes, mercifully, we palliate faults, and build up illusions to put from us much that is incomprehensible. If we look the thing—life—in the face, we must fall back on that pitiful whither—whence.

Hugh Derston is to be buried beside his parents. They say in the old days—before he became the victim of drink and drugs—he loved his mother well. Also, it is said, while he was yet a boy, there was a dog he risked his life to save. Even Bob allows he had genuine affection for Margaret, before he gave way to

vice. Oh! blessed custom of civilization, we ever seek to give the dead their due. We judge them by a more lenient code directly they are dead. We recognise their helplessness to redress the wrongs they have done. I stand apart from others about me. They knew him. I never saw him. But he died at a few days over forty-two, and he died amongst us.

Much is said in the village concerning him. It is left for Martha Heskins to say the bright, encouraging thing. She strikes the true note of hopefulness when she says:

"He's at rest, poor soul, and his illness hev given Mrs. Derston the chance to set us a rare example. He treated her ill enough in the days gone by. But she let bygones be bygones, and nursed him as if he had been a good husband all his days. I shouldn't ha' done it in her place. I shouldn't ha' looked on it as my duty. But Miss Margaret, bless her, ha' showed me I am wrong. There be them in this village may yet profit by her example."

I heartily agreed to this sensible view.

You write I must read Browning's *Saul* now, if ever I wish to enjoy it to the full. Thank you, shipmate. It was the happiest reminder you ever gave me. I have done so. Sometimes a book suits your mood. Sometimes it suits the place. When it responds to both these conditions, go quietly, go mirthfully. You are among the fortunate souls of the hour.

I am one of these. *Saul* suited my mood. It

accorded with this quiet background and setting, and more than all, it was in complete harmony with the Springtime, for if you want this beautiful thing to fill you with its utter beauty you must read it at the Springtide.

Bob Ingleby had never read it until yesterday. He appreciates it buoyantly, and in forcible language. He is not without a keen sense of the beauty of things. He is a zealous naturalist, especially where birds are concerned. I suppose you know all that, better than I can tell you.

I want you, Keith. I want to put Felix' letter into your hand, and ask you if I may believe he is better. Would he write in this gay, mirthful fashion if he were dying? I should not wonder. I grow anxious in spite of myself.

Every life has its pillars—must have them. They may be events in an eventful life, or travels, with their things seen, or friendships—and friendships are my pillars. I rear my thoughts on them to a considerable extent. I think about people ; my own personality does not greatly interest me. I cannot bear to lose a friend.

XXXIX.

April, 30th.

I TRY to be the good comrade of those about me. It is the way I can best translate duty, seeing I am an unattached atom with no particular walk in life to follow. It has to be optimistic, courageous camaraderie to be worth anything ; therefore, maybe, I fail, but not for lack of trying.

There is no news of Felix this week. For all that the world does not stand still. I am positively exultant in rejoicing with the folk of the Manor Farm. The house is fragrant with the sweet perfume of joyous hearts. A momentous thing has taken us all by surprise, so that when one of us meets another a shaft of gladness passes from one to the other.

I will tell you the story.

The elder Mrs. Wartley is my heroine, and mine is a fairy tale in its wonderfulness, and as beautiful and bountiful as a story of Joseph.

You remember I told you Mrs. Wartley's brothers emigrated to Australia while she was still almost a child. One married, one remained single. Both

flourished and grew rich, and thus followed the orthodox lines of the conventional fairy tale.

The unmarried brother recently died.

Mrs. Wartley had news of his death a fortnight or more ago. But when, this morning, the old brass-locked letter bag, which has done duty over fifty years for the family of Wartley, was unlocked, it was found to contain a letter from Australia. We were at breakfast, and Mrs. Wartley first opened a note from Mrs. Cameron on some parish matter. Then came the turn of the colonial missive.

She flushed all over her face as she read, and looked from one to the other of us.

"John," she gasped. "I don't think I can understand it. It is too good to be true. To think that George—after all these years!"

She handed the letter to her son, with her eyes full of tears.

Before even I knew the truth, I felt like blessing the name of the unknown George.

The delicious fact is this. The good George apparently never forgot his affection for the little sister in England. He died at eighty-six, and he has left her thirty thousand pounds. She finds it difficult to realize the fact.

"A fortune!" she muttered.

"John!" she said solemnly, having worked her little sum in division, "that will be six thousand pounds to each of you children. I . . . I can't believe it!"

She was trembling and agitated as a dear old soul should be, who suddenly becomes the favourite of fortune.

"It will be a God-send to Fanny, with all her little ones, and to Ralph and his young family in Canada. And six thousand pounds to you, John. My dear, my dear," she cried tremulously.

Think of us all quivering with excitement—John Wartley very quiet at the head of the table, but realizing that this sum will mean an immense deal to him. And May, behind the coffee pot, smiling radiantly. She has never made great demands on life, perhaps scarcely demand enough, yet I don't want her to be anything but what she is now. I don't want her to seek amusement and distraction outside her home. Increase of riches must not change her.

"You are a wealthy woman!" John Wartley said to the little lady.

"Me, my dear. No! no! I am only the sieve the money will pass through. I have portioned it all out in my mind. Thirty thousand pounds is a big sum, John. Thank God, I have no need of it. What should I do with thirty thousand pounds—a foolish old woman like me?" she laughed humorously.

"My boy, you will let May have Ezra Stedman regularly in the garden now, and she must have a new pony to drive."

She smiled knowingly at May. I revelled in being onlooker at this gladness of heart and mood. But I was more than onlooker—I shared in it.

The little lady did not knit, nor go actively about the house. She sat in the bow window with folded hands most of the morning.

"I'm going over in my mind the particular comfort this money will be to each one of them," she said softly, when, for a little while, I sat on the footstool beside her.

"John never had sufficient capital for this farm. He has gone through many anxious seasons—but now!"

It was said with a great sigh of relief, and the dear old face beamed.

"Won't you keep some of the money for yourself? There must be something you would love to spend it upon!" I remarked.

She smiled.

"I shall not need to rob that thirty thousand pounds to be able to afford a satin brocade for my best dress. My friend, Mary Anne Thompson, had a beautiful satin brocade. She used to go to Church in it on Sundays, and it looked rich and dignified. I always coveted one like it."

I rejoiced at this frivolity. It was sweet and fragrant, like the scent of lavender. I discovered Mary Anne Thompson had been dead ten years, so that the feminine longing for a satin brocade to wear at Church on Sundays has been repressed a long, long while.

After that, I went upstairs to my sanctum to write a thousand words of my book. The exhilaration of

this good fortune, and the grip at my heart at the little lady's confession concerning the black satin brocade, had put me into the exact mood I desired. My writing is to me so much a matter of mood, that I have to catch a good one whenever I can.

I had not completed more than half my task when I heard footsteps on the gravel outside. An organ-grinder was there, a sight as rare in this place as a country waggon and team in London. He ground out a depressing tune.

I begged a merrier one.

"A merry tune, lady. To be sure!"

The merry tune on that poor worn-out organ was more melancholy than the sad one had been.

He was not old, but he was an uncomfortable looking individual. He was big boned, and the bones seemingly were not sufficiently tightly welded together. He would have been comfortable in armour, I fancy.

I gave him some money, and he smiled—the smile transformed his face. From it I discovered he was an optimist in spite of his uncomfortable joints and long back.

He was communicative. He had a tidy little body for a wife, a son too; the boy was doing well with his regiment in India. Daughters—no, he never had a daughter, but one day he hoped his boy would marry.

"Why did he tramp the country with his organ?"

Because it was born in him—his father had done the same. Once, he had tried to settle down, and make

willow skeps and baskets. It was no use. God Almighty never made him to sit still. He was made to tramp. He wanted the free air, and the sunshine, or the trickle and babble of rain, or the hustling of the wind—these were what he wanted.

"Petulengro," I muttered under my breath.

He knew then—this organ-grinder, whether gipsy race or no—the secret of life, and life's joy—joy of the earth through his being.

I wondered if this man had more music in him than that old organ knew, and I asked him.

Again he smiled that wonderful smile of his, and drew forth from the depths of his clothing—a flute. He touched it tenderly, and he played. He forgot time, and me, and everything, and it was only the children and May coming home from the village which brought him back from—musicland.

He played the organ again to please the little ones, and then he went his way. Happiness is the man's birthright—he has the temperament that makes for contentment. He had said to me:

"Lady, I ha' had my troubles, there ain't the lessest doubt o' that, but so long as there ain't the gall o' malice, nor enmity, we mortals can square up to troubles. Happiness is like yeast, which rises and leavens same as the parable says it du, and as we may see when the dough is to the top o' the tin."

We both laughed heartily.

"I'll remember that," I told him.

Long after he had gone I thought of him wandering

down the quiet white roads, footsore, perhaps, and weary of the greasy strap across his shoulder, with the weight of the organ upon it. But—content, philosophical, and living the life he rejoiced in—a happy pilgrim. That life may always find him as cheery and light-hearted as I found him to-day, is my fervent wish for this wayfarer.

I did not settle down to my pen again. A roof over my head had suddenly become a penance. There is a larch and pine plantation not far distant from the garden. The new pale green of larches amid the dark pines, the sky, heavenly blue above, make one of the Spring wonders. I sauntered down to a clump of three silver birches set in a green pasture—such tender, such small green leaves, such slender drooping grace and airiness—a study in green and silver. My God! And then there was nothing for it, but I must go to my beech wood. My heart cried out for beauty. I went. Beech trees in their newest green bewilder me with their artistry. The foliage is thin almost to transparency, with a tint suggesting that sunlight itself has been mixed with the green. And the great smooth boles of these trees, green on the shady side, a quiet grey colour on the sunny side, are grand, and beautiful, and noble, without the quality of ruggedness. Everything was still, and silent, but all the leaves were so young, there was great gladness, and there was sunlight over it all.

XL.

May, 6th.

SUSANNAH is wedded. She has lived at the Manor Farm for five years, and from the Manor Farm she was married—last Thursday. Previously, she put her successor into the ways—criticised her, and approved of her manner of scouring milk pails. She went so far as to caution her against being led away by Adelaide.

"Don't you be beguiled by fair words about suffragettin'. It ain't for the likes o' us. It makes Adelaide altogether too uppish. She's too big for her place, that's what she is!"

All this and a great deal more Susannah impressed upon her successor.

The day before the wedding there was a savoury smell issuing from the kitchen regions, from morn till eve. On *the* morning, the wedding presents were laid out, and the table set for the feast, just as the bride's relations arrived—a ponderous mother, a small, timid father, a bouncing sister, and a bashful brother.

Susannah had herself cooked the wedding feast, and

Martha-like she was anxious as to its welfare. She must turn the jellies from their moulds, she must garnish the roast fowls. She had little mind to bestow on her family at this stage. In the end she had positively to be ordered off to dress. She graciously permitted her mother and sister to accompany her to lend helping hands. Susannah does not know herself as the heroine of the moment. She cannot rise to it. Neither is she overwhelmed with feminine vanity. In less time than I could have deemed possible, she reappeared, tight-laced, smiling, and oppressed with the newness of the wedding garments. She had dressed herself after her own taste—dress of lilac hue, hat grey, and feathers green, boots brown, and gloves tight, white, and split. For all this she looked buxom and comely. Susannah's crowning glory is true flaxen hair.

May Wartley and myself drove down to the church with the boys. Albert was already there. He tried to look at his ease, but his boots were tight, and creaked. He mopped his brow, and his ears were scarlet. Lady Jane says that, in a man, this last is a sign of extreme nervousness. The bride followed quickly after us, and led her father up the aisle. I ought to put it the other way, but I am stating facts. The rest of the family had been marshalled up to the front pew. Across the way sat Albert's two sisters, a brother and an uncle. The two families cast furtive and curious glances at each other.

I heard the bashful brother remark:

"I've picked up two o' Susannah's hairpins a'ready."

Bride and bridegroom spoke up valiantly with their responses. And presently, issuing from the vestry, the bridegroom came smilingly to ask if May and I would sign the register.

The wedding feast was a great success. At its close we went to drink the health of bride and bridegroom.

Albert returned thanks, certainly Albert has a good deal of character.

"Ladies and gentlemen"—he bowed to us. "Susannah, that is to say, my wife and I, wishes, both of us, to thank yer kindly. I am much obliged to yer, mam, and also to the master for all yer kindness. *We* are much obliged, I should say, ain't we, Susannah?"

Susannah nodded vigorously, and pulled him down by his coat tails.

"Yer ha' said what yer hev said very well, Albert, but yer won't be able to go further, so jest yer sit down."

We all clapped heartily.

Sonny went round to Albert's side.

"Susannah isn't going to make my bread and milk now she is married. Are you goin' to milk the cows, Albert, now you are married?" he queried.

"Why yes, Sir—sure I am, 'ceptin' this afternoon. I got to keep Susannah now, as well as myself in wittles. Sure I must earn the money, somehow."

The word money caught Sonny's little mind. He

looked solemn, felt in his tunic pocket, and brought out a sixpence.

"That money is for *you!*" he said, and laid it in Albert's hand.

Susannah and her mother, and one of Albert's sisters simultaneously cried:

"Bless his little heart!"

Albert looked sheepishly at the sixpence, and did not know what to do with it. Finally, I saw him feel for the miniature pocket and drop it back again.

When all the guests had departed, Albert and Susannah walked quietly down to the little cottage that is to be their home. From my sanctum window I watched them go. Their way took them down a *drift*, across a meadow, to a little lonely cottage by a roadside—with two more cottages lower down the road for company. They had the glory of a setting sun in their faces as they went, and the evening was still and warm. They had gone out from us to begin a new life together.

They were Isaac and Rebecca in that old, old world; they were wedded lovers of medieval times—past and present and future mingled. May happiness and contentment go with them all their days. May God bless them—that sums up all the good wishes into one great and mighty one—having said that, there is nothing left to say.

I caught the echo of something wild, and beautiful, and full of poetry in a field scene, three or four evenings ago. It is not only my pleasure, or your pleasure,

or the pleasure of folks generally in the springtide that we may reckon upon.

All the winter, the farm horses sleep the night in straw-strewn yards. One night this week commenced their summer change of quarters—to green meadows. I stood and watched their joy in the freedom, the green, the space. They forgot they were tired and work-weary. The younger disported themselves like careless colts; in all of them was abounding delight.

XLI.

May, 12th.

The *Morning Post* announced a week or more ago that Colonel and Mrs. Bailey have returned from Italy. Since then I have had a long letter from Barbara. She never realizes she is an enigma to me. She thinks I understand her better than most of the people she knows. I gather she is glad to be back in England. She remonstrates with me for not marrying Paul, and says she cannot comprehend my refusal. My green year is another mystery to her. I must suppose, therefore, I puzzle her as she puzzles me. She takes me to task, and asks why I am not in London. She cannot believe I wish to miss the whole season. It is exactly what I mean to do.

A soft pussy-cat purr runs through her letter—the cumulative effect of self-congratulation. She has done the befitting and desirable thing in marrying Colonel Bailey.

She invites me to stay with them, and honours me by asking me to be their first visitor. I may run up for a night or two. I should like to make closer acquaintance with the man Barbara has chosen to marry.

When I write to Barbara I am in the mood to play the fool, to dilate as a fool, on a fool's subject—folly. I see Barbara smiling indulgently over my letters. She has not a big enough range of emotions, and in consequence she is poor and to be pitied. I write thus, yet I love Barbara. I pity her.

She tells me Felix is bringing out a book by her husband on "Sport in India."

Instead of working through a busy London season, I sit in this old Manor Farm garden and try to pry into life as birds, and bees, and flowers know it. When the bees come to pansy flowers, it is as if they came to look into their faces and kiss them—a salute, and then away—to kiss yet other lips. They stayed much longer at each crocus. But there, you only thought of them as greedy robbers. Crocuses have not faces as pansies have. It is said that blue is the bees' favourite colour. I laugh over the clumsy bumble bees on dainty, light forget-me-nots. They are more comical still when they insist on rifling white violets. I watched a bee's funeral the other day. He lay dead, poor little fellow, on the board of the hive, and the living tumbled over, and hustled him heedlessly. At last a bee came out of the hive, and slowly and painfully brought him to the edge of the board, and tipped him over into the orchard grass below. I ought not to have used the pronoun I have done—only the drones are masculine, and these were workers. I have learned to distinguish between drones and workers. I wonder if you also smile

indulgently over my letters and my follies, as Barbara does!

I rode through Walton yesterday afternoon. I came into it from an exploring expedition on its farther side, and did not recognise my bearings until I was in the village street.

I met Lady Sybil Reid taking flowers for the church vases, and she asked me if I would like to see the church, and went with me to stable the Great Auk at "The Ostrich."

"I often think of you!" she told me frankly. "It is enchanting to take your life and experiment with it as you are doing. It is well worth while to get beyond one's own insignificant circle, and learn life from many vantage points—as you are doing.

"It will colour all your after life!" she added enthusiastically.

I was astonished thus to hear another putting into words my own thoughts and views. My whole heart went out to this other woman who thought as I thought on this matter.

"My husband and I are very little in London," she continued; "we are country folk, and we like to have time to live. So do you!"

I agreed heartily.

"Much that *is* happiness we fail to acknowledge as such when life is a tearing hurry to catch up big functions and excitements," she laughed.

At the church gate she spoke of Felix.

"The specialist is very reassuring, and is himself

astonished at his improvement. I wrote and told Felix you and I had met at last—and he is delighted."

I remembered the words in which Felix had described this woman to me, and had foreseen that we should be drawn towards each other.

There was a bunch of lilies of the valley, fragrant, dainty, and grown under glass, among the rest of the flowers. She took them into her hand. "Come," she said softly, and we went a few steps up a crosspath, and stood beside a white marble grave stone.

ANTHONY SAMUEL REID.

Aged 2 years.

She knelt down and laid the flowers tenderly on the green mound, cleared away a dead leaf or two, and I think, sighed.

"My only little child is there. Felix was his godfather. He was here when he died a couple of years ago. He was so kind—I can never forget."

She spoke—softly.

Then we went into the dim, silent church. She arranged her vases quickly, deftly, and exquisitely. The flowers were beautiful—she would, I feel sure, bring only the best she had. When she had finished, she laid her hand on the altar rail and looked up through the east window.

"Is it well with the child?" she asked, and after a pause, answered: "It is well."

She smiled at me.

"I say those words when I bring my flowers. It has become a habit, but it makes me happy."

She locked the door behind us, and I felt as if I had known this woman a long while.

"Now!" she said gaily, "will you tell me why you would not let me call upon you when Felix asked you if I might? I told him to ask you!"

I gave her the true version of my refusal.

"You did quite rightly," she allowed heartily. "Will you waive ceremony, and go home to tea with me now? I will have your horse fetched."

Of course I went. We walked half a mile, or thereabouts, then turned into a broad, winding drive that presently brought us close up to one of the most picturesque houses I ever saw, with lovely fluted and twisted chimneys, and other fascinations of Elizabethan architecture. Latticed panes were everywhere. The interior was like a dream house: the rooms were stately rooms, yet not over large. It was the atmosphere more than anything else that captivated me—an atmosphere of serene gladness, of bewitching companionship.

We had tea and much pleasant talk. Sir Samuel came in just as the Great Auk was led round. I can never imagine anything more absurd or mistaken, than those reports that he and his wife were not fitted to each other.

Keith, dear, I shall ever be glad I spent this May afternoon with Sybil Reid, and that she treated me as she did. She treated me, not as a stranger to whom she would be courteous and friendly, but as one to whom she could say what she would, intimately, and

as if she had said similar things many times before. To take me—the stranger—to that little white grave, to say before me that which she says alone in a silent church, to explain as she did explain—was the finest, daintiest thing, a friendship of sweetest subtlety. It was as if she had said: "Come near! do not stand off from me any longer—here is my real self for you!"

It touched my heart. It was something I had not expected. I can but be thankful I had the perception to see, and to understand.

In my sanctum, afterwards, I went over it all again. I wonder if you guess how beloved this quiet room has become. In it I enjoy the most satisfying sense of blessed solitude, such as comes only in the places in which one is habitually alone. A place you are accustomed to share with others has not this spirit of solitude and rest for you. After a while I had a bed-time romp with Alec and Sonny. I thought of the little Anthony—this two years in his grave. I wonder in what manner May Wartley's soul expresses its gratitude for these bonny boys, when she remembers this other mother bereft of the only child she had.

You would think nature was gracious, and bountiful, and smiling on us if you saw our continuous blue skies and sunshine. It is not so. For many days, with this strong sunshine, we have had a sharp wind, drying all before it. The mangolds and some of the turnips are sown—and there is no moisture

anywhere. The earliest sown seed 'chicked.' It sprouted, and for lack of moisture the growth withered. Where this has happened the seed will need to be resown, with much additional labour, and loss of time. The later sown seed lies hard and dry in the ground, as on the day it was sown, and the soil is parched above and below it. Men's eyes have grown careworn and anxious again. For three and twenty days there has been no rain, and you feel that this wind sweeping over the land is as cruel as a whip.

Every day John Wartley says: "A gentle rain for a few hours would do a world of good." But it does not come.

In time of stress like this I watch May Wartley curiously. There are women who commiserate in easy platitudes, but never share a burden. She divides a trouble and takes the half for herself. She does it imperceptibly, almost, and does not guess how rare an achievement it is. Few, I imagine, realize the gentle, sound philosophy of life to which she has attained. It is beyond the reach of those tainted with selfishness, and centred in themselves. Its roots are embedded in sympathy.

XLII.

May, 18th.

I WEIGH a stone more than when I arrived at the Manor Farm. I am bound to tell you, that you may prepare your Katherine to meet in her future sister-in-law, one ponderous in body if not in mind. I often think of the 'noble damsel.' You are illuminative when you write: "picture her in a garden of flowers—loving them with tender solicitude, stepping gaily and briskly among them, not too sentimental, and never capricious. The garden is the most fitting background I can conceive for a stranger to use as a background." I put her into one glowing with colour, yet with cool shady groves, with a stream in it, and a stretch of green lawn. She sings as a bird sings, or silvery laughter parts her lips. I like the picture—it bespeaks contentment, and serenity, and the gentle hilarity of mind that shine through the eyes of those who possess these qualities.

The *names* of colours even, are a joy to me—the biblical blue and purple and scarlet are connected in my mind irrevocably with pomegranates. I do not quite know what they stand for, but whenever pome-

granates and these colours in this order rise in my memory, I am aware of a magic moment of exuberance.

But I must get to more objective things. Pelton is not without a charming excitement at the present moment. If you meet anyone, he or she asks if you have heard the news.

I have seen quite a number of life's phases in the village life about me—birth, and marriage, and death, and much that intervenes between, both of sadness and gladness. The excitement concerns a little middle aged woman, but the whole community is on the tiptoe of expectation. We await a climax—to come in due time. Meanwhile, I will tell you as far as I may the story of a man and a maid.

Our village blacksmith—William Ormond—a lean, wiry man, ever smelling of sour leather, and his brother, Peter, have, since Peter left the army, between them run the blacksmith's shop. William is master, Peter is man. William sings lustily, and makes jokes with all and sundry who bring horses to be shod. Peter never sings, and does not often make a joke. People chaff William, but never Peter; they are wonderfully careful not to hurt his feelings.

My old pensioner—Corporal Barker—and Peter are close friends; the army and its welfare and doings is the big subject they have in common. The old soldier is more than thirty years older than Peter, but they are not the less good comrades on that account. The Corporal is an old Crimean veteran.

Peter was through our Egyptian Campaign. There are endless discussions between them.

Peter was also in India. In one of our petty, punishing expeditions he was wounded. By an evil chance, his name was confused with that of another trooper. He was reported killed instead of wounded.

He had left in this quiet village the girl he loved. She was a servant here at the Manor Farm during the elder Mrs. Wartley's reign. She and Peter had been boy and girl together, and from a lad he had made up his mind she must become his wife. But Peter was not a home-keeping youth, and the sight of the Corporal home on furlough on one occasion made him enlist. Before he joined his regiment he won Alice Travers' promise to wait for him.

Thus were matters between them, when this evil tiding of his death was brought to her. She did not doubt the truth of the report.

Mrs. Wartley yet remembers the agony graved on her grief-stricken face. She left the farm and returned to her parents in the village. A week she stayed in her home. Then she left Pelton.

"I'm going—I'm going right away. If I stay here I shall lose my reason," she cried.

They tried to dissuade her. It was no use.

She disappeared. No one knew whither she went, nor how it fared with her. No word was received from her, and many believed she had ended her life in her despair.

Peter wrote home as soon as his wound would let

him. It was the first intimation that he was alive. His family threw off their mourning garments, and, metaphorically, sang for joy and great gladness. But Alice had gone some weeks when this good news came. His brother wrote and told him what had happened.

It was grim, heart-breaking news for Peter. He might be no hero, but he had a faithful heart. He served his time, and in due course came back to Pelton, and lived with William. He was prematurely old, and whatever had been his temperament as a lad, he returned a sad and silent man. And before his return, and since, he has spent every penny he can spare in seeking a clue as to the whereabouts of the woman he loved. In spite of that, he is not one of those persistent beings who hope against hope—and hope to the end if needs be.

"There is little doubt she is dead," he has told his brother from time to time, when he brings himself to speak of the matter, which is now nearly twenty years old.

He has been back in the village these nine years—William's man at the forge.

Now comes the astounding part of my story.

About a year ago, Martha Heskins' nephew went from Pelton to Canada. A week ago a letter was received with the wonderful news. He has found Alice Travers.

She is the postmistress in a lonely Canadian town—a town dumped down, as it were, like an oasis amid thousands of acres of farm land. To this town men

ride in many miles, to post, and to receive their letters. One day young Jimmy Ireton, new to the district, handed in his letter addressed to his mother in Pelton. The postmistress's eye fell upon the familiar place name. She clutched the counter for support.

Young Jimmy had been a child of three or four when Alice Travers went away. But, like all the children who have lived in Pelton since, he was familiar with the story.

She questioned him closely, and disclosed the fact that she had lived here.

Young Jimmy puts it forcibly in his letter to his mother, which I have read. He says:

"I looked at her, and I says: 'Be your name Alice Travers?'"

"Yes," she says.

"Then I told her I had some great news for her. I told her Peter wasn't dead, as she thought he was —that he had served his time, and was home again.

"She listened as if she was turned to a stone, and when I had told her, she says, trembling and hesitating:

"'Is he married?'

"'Married!' says I. 'No, Mam, Peter h'ain't thought o' gettin' married.'"

And young Jimmy in his boyish glee wrote enthusiastically of the little postmistress.

"You go right away and tell Peter the news," he adjured his mother.

And this she did, and then round to Martha to

tell her how he had taken it. Martha has told me what happened.

"Maria tied an old handkercher over her head, and down to the shop she goes. Peter was settin' light to the fire, and Maria stood in the doorway.

"Man,' she says, 'jest you pull yourself together. I've rare news from my boy, Jimmy—news, Peter, as concerns *you*.'

"And Peter dropped the bellows, and stepped over to Maria like one who has seen a vision.

"She put the letter into his hand.

"'Read it for yourself,' she said.

"But womanlike, she must hear herself put the news into words.

"'It's your lass, Peter. My Jimmy ha' been and found her for yer.'

"'I could hev knocked him down with a feather. And he stood tremblin' like one took with the ague,' Maria confided to her sister. 'He give me the letter back, and never spoke, and walked out o' the shop and left me standin' there. Por Peter, he was that overcome. I don't think he could ha' spoke to have saved his life.'"

He and William have counted the latter's little hoard of savings, and next week Peter starts for Canada.

Martha remembers Alice Travers.

"She was a self-reliant wench, as pleasant spoken a one as you could wish to see, honest and steady, and rarely fond o' Peter from a child."

Both her parents have died since she went away. Widow West is her Aunt, and her two sisters married and went to London. Martha's husband too, is by way of being a relation, being a cousin of Alice's mother.

The cottage people of a village are many of them related. Here in Pelton, it is an entertaining amusement to discover who is related to whom. Stones in the churchyard bear names and dates of long ago, and still the names are to be found here, doing duty as valiantly as they did many generations ago. There is an old, crooked stone, green with age, showing where lies another David Snow. And this, I take it, must be Davy's grandfather.

"Everything has an end, and a sausage has two!" says the Dutch proverb. An end, too, has come to the period of quiet longing for a satin brocade dress. It has been bought—this rich, handsome brocade that 'will almost stand by itself.' And the dear little lady and I have made two journeys to Carminster, concerning its making and fitting. Now the dress itself is home. Last Sunday *it* went to church. I heard the proud little wearer mutter to herself:

"If my dear husband could but see me!"

Mrs. Cameron came up the next day expressly to admire it, and it was brought down for her close inspection. With a snowy white shawl above it, Granny Wartley looks sweet and lovable in this gown of long and patient desiring.

XLIII.

May, 24th.

You and I have our delight in studying humanity as a strong interest between us. I exulted in those studies of friendships you sent me last mail. Your vision is clearer than mine, and you have the trick of divining motive. My book advances. It forces me to study motherhood closely. I have summed up the mothers about me something after this fashion:

May Wartley's is the gentle, calm motherhood, which yet has the wisdom to be neither weak nor over-indulgent. If it should be scarcely assertive enough in the years to come, this will be counter-balanced by a love that should invoke confidence, and her children's intimate fellowship and friendship.

I may not so easily judge the elder Mrs. Wartley as a mother. I fancy motherhood with her meant that tender, primitive love for her offspring nature delights in. In her case, it was made characteristic and beautiful by reason of her gift of a singularly deep sympathy, and understanding of her children's natures.

Mrs. Cameron—more intellectual than those I have

named—lacks this sense of understanding and sympathy, and by reason of having a too great diversity of interests, has accepted motherhood only casually. I suppose she failed to see that motherhood demands limitations in other directions.

I hazard the opinion, not with certainty, that Mrs. Marshall is a wiser wife than mother. A woman who fusses does not arrive at the front rank of motherhood.

I told you I had learned lessons from my humble friend, Martha. I must not overlook the study in motherhood she affords. Curious as it may sound for one of her class, I think I may say, hers is a tactful, patient motherhood.

Our own mother was inspiring. Her motto must have been: 'Spend and be spent.' If she saw a flame, she fanned it. She never quenched ardour. Hers was a buoyant, gracious motherhood.

Do not think less of my dear Lady Jane if I divulge a quaint confession she once made to me. It concerns a period when she was a young and beautiful woman. She said:

"I rejoiced exceedingly each time a child was born to me, that he was a boy. I dreaded the birth of a girl. If I had had a daughter I should have been jealous of her. My dear, I could see it all—I should have been jealous—jealous of her, even while she was a child—jealous of the love her father would give her, and his possible admiration. There! it sounds a ruthless, hard thing to say, and it is only because I am honest and outspoken that I put into words what

I have seen other women feel. Once I taxed a mother with this feeling—she stoutly denied it—and I was but the more convinced how it was with her."

Ruby Cameron is at home once more. She still wears that look of revelation on her face, as if some force has driven her along an undreamed of course into a super-world. Since her arrival she has suffered a cruel shock. Richard Marshall wrote and put clearly and decisively the advantage it might be to him to take this opportunity to become an airman. I can imagine it was a fine manly letter. He told her it might be a big thing for him, and anyway, he looks upon it as a thing to be done. In his profession he is ambitious, and he is not the man to be daunted by danger. He wants Ruby's permission and approval before he embarks on the enterprise. You can guess her state of mind.

We must not expect from the Ruby Camerons of this world, that which is not theirs to give. She vastly surprised her little world when she bestowed on Richard Marshall this intense passion of love. I see it is too much to expect that she can over-ride these poignant feelings, and rise above herself. She was right when she told me her great love comprised her whole being. It does, and leaves no room for ambition, nor for pride in what Richard Marshall might achieve—so long as danger attends his efforts. Her love is at once her strength, and her weakness. I do not know if you can understand this nature, nor that I can make it clearer to you.

Two days ago she brought her trouble to me.

"It is a black nightmare which drowns my happiness. There is no need for him to run this risk," she cried.

"Men must run this risk," I reminded her.

"Some men must—not Richard!"

"Yes!" I agreed; "some men—must!"

"They court death at every trip."

She spoke, and looked at me with eyes brimming with tears, and added:

"I will not let him!"

It was the speech I expected.

"He wants terribly to do this thing," she said.

She wrung her hands.

"Unless it meant a great deal to him, he is not the man to have put this burden on you," I said, as gently as I could.

I dragged her up close to me, and held her tight.

"Men must work and women must weep." So it has been, so it must be; the old story repeats itself through the centuries.

I could only try to soothe and quiet. I dared not plead for his project, nor acquiesce in her longing to hold him back.

God only knows how it will end. Richard Marshall is coming down shortly, and he has given her the interval to think the matter over.

Bob Ingleby has heard of this affair. We had a modest village concert last evening, and he came and sat beside me.

"I bet you a sovereign," he said, "if Richard Marshall's flying depends on Ruby—Richard Marshall will never fly.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "what you would do in Ruby's place?"

"It is what I have been wondering myself!" I told him.

"What *would* you do, Joan?" he asked.

"I should try to work myself to such a pitch of enthusiasm that I should want him to do it. And, failing that, I should hold him back by main force, even if it meant hanging on to his coat tails."

"It would never come to the last," he laughed.

I am not so certain it would not, Keith.

I feel I have let Margaret Derston's name drop out of my letters to you of late. I scarcely know how this has come about. I see her often. But it is difficult to write of her when there is little to tell—the time is uneventful. Suddenly, she stands alone without care or anxiety. It is this emancipation from fear and expectation of evil that fills her. Like all who have suffered much in a noble spirit, her nature has developed in depth and intensity.

This is the calm and quietude after stress and storm. The old home enfolds her lovingly. During the time she nursed and tended Hugh Derston, we all, to some extent, and inevitably, lost mental touch with her. A suspicion of that aloofness remains.

I am reminded of the saying: "How little of all we know is said." I wonder if you remember an old

legend which tells us: "the imprint on the human lip is given us by God when He sends us into the world. He lays his finger there—and bids us not to tell what we know."

Much must have passed in those last weeks with her erring husband. Was he remorseful before he died—did he plead for her love and forgiveness? Were there moments of deep, tense emotion? It is not for the world to know. Yet it all tends to keep her mentally a little apart from us. We are conscious of a sensitiveness, and that touch of shyness we know in spite of ourselves, towards those whom lately death has robbed. Perhaps I put into too definite words, that of which we are but vaguely aware.

Peter has hied him forth. He has started for Canada. If it all befalls as he plans, he will marry the little postmistress and bring her home with as small delay as possible. He went forth a smiling, radiant Peter, such a Peter as must have been, years ago, and since has lain buried under his black grief. After the many grey years, I have a fancy that the new joy and hope are all the more triumphant and golden for coming in the *merry* month of May.

Inspiration was happy, indeed, in the man who dubbed any month thus, and more especially the May month.

You may read Maeterlinck to understand and know all that a swarm of bees signifies. But there is much in the "sight's self" as I saw it last Sunday—bees have a great predilection for Sabbath day swarming,

it seems. You feel it is one of the subtlest mysteries of the hive—a queen and her thousands of followers, foodless, and homeless—adrift, and a summer's industry before them to store the winter's sustenance. They hung a huge living mass to a pear tree branch. Albert is a wise, understanding beeman. I stood a cautious distance away and watched him secure the swarm with quiet, deliberate movement, and unprotected by gloves or veil.

"No, no," he says, "they 'ont hurt me—they knows, bless 'em. A swarm allus be in a good tempered mind, so long as it ain't windy. Susannah hev a mind to keep bees, Miss, but I doubt if she would make the hand my mother did at taking a swarm. Talked to her bees a lot, she did, telled 'em all her troubles, and put the hives into mournin' wie a bit o' crape when any o' the family died." Albert mopped the top of his head. "The year my mother died we lost all the bees. A wet winter followed a wet summer and most folks in the neighbourhood lost bees that year. But mother's ailed within a little o' her bein' buried o' the September. You may believe me, Miss, they was too weak and ill to defend themselves from wasps. Wasps robbed 'em cruel, they did. My mother would rarely hev grieved over that, she would. And when they was dead, and we comes to look, there was a handful o' dodmans in the hive. Yer never see such a distressed hive, Miss, it was heart-rendin'. But Susannah ha' bought two basket hives, second-hand, cheap, and she be set on

bees—she as knows nought about 'em. No more than you do, Miss, axin' your pardon."

I watch the bees at the flowers, and at the hives as they alight on the boards with their little bags on their legs swelled out with spoil. I watch them fanning with their wings at the entrance, and I feel I am not so wholly ignorant of the bee people as I was in my pre-Pelton days. I feel sometimes as I watch, I catch just a hint of their spirit. Their hum has its music for me, the smell of the hives its spell. For the bees themselves I feel even a tinge of reverence.

XLIV.

June, 1st.

Ten days ago, the drought ended in the hours of gentle rain the fields craved. It was a merciful *finale*, and the earth-smell, when first the rain descended, is unforgettable. It seemed to me that the earth expressed her relief, and joy unutterable, in this silent fragrance. All things have their means of praising the Creator in their supreme moments. As I stood and drank in this joy-begetting fragrance, all my being responded to happiness. Not once in my life before, had rain been the infinite blessing I then realized it to be.

Since that day, I have experienced its sterner aspect.

The Great Auk and I were far from the Manor Farm. I had been over to see Sybil Reid, and I was on my way back when a wild storm broke over us. There were high currents of air eddying clouds at headlong pace, but the heart of the storm lay compact and massed along the western sky, rising quickly out of the horizon. Now, there was a profound stillness, and again a shivering passage of wind. There were frightened noises—birds' twitters that had neither

song nor melody in them. Sheep stood huddled together, and bleated dismay.

It grew suddenly almost dark, with a great sense of oppression. Between me and the storm the ground dipped and rose again, and on this far, wide slope I saw the storm break. It drew nearer. The stillness ended, and a rushing wind took its place. My way lay south-west, but more west than south. I rode into the storm. It grew rawly cold.

The Great Auk's instinct told him of the coming outburst. He was oppressed, even though he went valiantly. Lightning flashed into my face from monstrous shaped, lurid clouds. The lightning was as I had never known it before, as if it came from a strangely low stratum of atmosphere, or I fancied it so. It was terrifying—it seemed almost to envelop me. The thunder roared as if it were confined in some vast cavern. I was alone, the only human soul so far as eye could reach—alone, with that rushing frightened wind, and the fury of rain hurrying towards me. Suddenly, heavy great drops fell, then the full downpour. Everything was blotted out, as rain came seething down. The horse refused to face it, and wheeled round. I heard one horrible, rending, unearthly crash. A great ash tree was riven asunder down to the very earth. It fell apart. My horse trembled. I was there in a vortex of implacable rage and fury. I was there for nature to assault and lash. What did I, a dweller in towns, know of these mighty ravings, superb fury, supreme abandonment—nothing.

I was terror stricken. I tried to speak to the Great Auk, but no audible words came. The rain beat upon us unmercifully. I knew of no shelter anywhere.

At last—I heard horse's hoofs, and horse and rider rode up to me. It was Bob Ingleby.

"All right," he shouted. "I saw you go. It is a big storm, isn't it?"

He led the way; we turned into a lane, and presently we reached a field barn, far removed from any house. He ran back the heavy doors on their rollers, lifted me bodily out of the saddle, and led the two horses into the barn. Then he turned up a skep for me to sit on—it was the only thing available.

He wrung the water from my habit, rubbed my hands, for they were past feeling. That great tree riven asunder and felled with a crash more heart-chilling than the thunder itself, had well nigh unnerved me—a great shuddering sob burst from me—and Bob said all the cheering cheery things he could think of, and we watched the storm from our safe haven.

We watched it spend itself, and a clearer sky rise behind it. We followed in its wake—we had three miles yet to go.

I tried to thank him for braving the storm on my behalf.

He smiled down at me.

"Can't you see how it is with me, Joan—that it is my happiness to look after you?"

At any time during our friendship Bob might have said a thing like that to me, and I should have understood it was based wholly on the friendship between us. This was not. There were other words. My whole life for you, dear one, is transparent—you must know. He asked me to marry him. I desperately hope it was done on the spur of the moment. He had found me in pitiable plight, and cared for me, and soothed and comforted me. I had appealed to all that was strong and tender in him, in my weakness. I hope it was thus.

There was only one answer. I hated myself for hurting him. I hated the part I had to play to my good comrade. It was as if I suddenly failed him. He did not make it painful. He took it smiling, if I may put it like that. Do not laugh at me when I say pity is a terribly tender sentiment—and pity for Bob has run through the thread of my life since October. And now I stood to deal my blow. Blows had been rained on him sufficiently, God knows, and I added mine. I could have comforted him—poor me—it is not wily conceit of myself makes me say that. I can read Bob like a book. There is much in each of us, the other understands, and something tells him he wants me—that my closer comradeship would make him happy.

For him and for Paul there is a place in my heart nothing can efface. Do not think less of womankind because one poor, loving soul hated to hurt these two as she has done, that she gives them the next best

thing her heart has to give—her loving comradeship. Womanlike, in spite of my pain and pity, I can't, for the life of me, help a thrill of pride and happiness in knowing that two men as good and true as these, love me.

Bob would not let me revile myself.

"It isn't your fault," he said.

He called it presumption on his part, and I had to make him understand I should never so regard it. Bob is a man in the best sense of the word. I, at any rate, feel honoured at being loved by him.

Our shortest way back to the Manor Farm lay through my beloved beech wood. There were wide masses of white woodruff in flower, and ferns—those great male ferns have unfurled their fronds but wear still their tender, early green. The young beech leaves above, the young ferns below, with those stretches of white woodruff, made a broad study in white and green. The sun burst forth, and everything was silvered with rain drops. Presently, the tragedy of the storm in the wood showed itself—a giant beech tree lay prone and torn from the ground. The sun was almost down—the time when it is loveliest in the woods.

I think the beauty of the scene touched us both; that we were glad to share this quiet loveliness together, after what had passed. There is some mystery, some natural magic—where trees herd. We have learned to comprehend that with bees the spirit of the hive animates thousands of intelligences.

What if something vaguer, lower perhaps, but yet truly existent, is in forest and woodland, and sensed in some measure by us? Does Browning in those many passages mean something like that—to him the place is—'silent and aware.' 'The pines commune and have deep thoughts.'

Bob would hear of nothing else than delivering me himself into the hands of May Wartley.

"I make you responsible for her not catching rheumatic fever," he laughed, and graphically told how he had found me under the fury of the heavens.

Then he took my hand in both his own, and looked deep down into my soul. He smiled, and his hold tightened. He did not speak, he did not even say good-bye—he just went away and left me, with a great, shuddering sigh.

May had already gone from the room.

XLV.

June, 6th.

Bob Ingleby is more than the sportsman in the field. The sporting spirit enters into all he does—and is. I can think of no higher testimony to give a man than that. It means playing the game of life, fair and square. I cannot imagine Bob Ingleby doing anything that should prevent him looking any man straight in the face. He has been at pains to put things between us on their old footing. That confession of his makes no self-conscious blank wall between us. I think he is glad to feel I know what I know. You remember our old drill master's stentorian—'As you were.' We are acting up to that. Only, into our friendship has crept something not there before, and into ourselves—I speak for myself—a deeper understanding of life and its great essentials. I have it borne in upon me that Bob Ingleby is one of those who in this life get little for themselves and give much. Yet I would give much to know I am wrong.

Ruby has suffered badly over this question of Richard Marshall becoming an airman. He put

the decision into her hands, as I have already told you.

"Joan!" she said. "How could he imagine I would let him?"

"Ruby!" I returned as solemnly. "Do you suppose the men who do fly have no dear ones to love them? Many of them have wives and sweethearts!"

I had no desire to lacerate her feelings, and did not drive my thrust home as I might have done, by adding, that the intensity of their love might make some women efface themselves and their own feelings. And now Richard Marshall is down at the Vicarage, and the matter has been threshed out between them. He has abandoned the idea. Through the quick sensibility of her great, eager love, Ruby Cameron realizes his heartache and bitter disappointment. She longs for the courage and strength to say—Go and do what you will. Her own timid nature, and fearfulness, and lack of courage hold her back.

Ought she to rise to it? Her whole being has grown and widened and gained. I cannot make up my mind if nobility of character demanded this. If so, she may come to it still. To change a woman from the Ruby that was, to the Ruby who could do this, takes time. I dare not judge her. I should like to know the womenkind of some of our airmen, and from them to learn at first hand their feelings on this subject. It is a modern danger, and it is the modern woman who has to face it for her dear one, be he son, husband, or sweetheart.

Richard Marshall said a few words to me on the matter. What he did not say, rather than what he did, showed me the depth of his disappointment. His father is also disappointed ; he is ambitious for him. Mrs. Marshall—the situation is not without humour—has been brought by this matter to feel a sincere and warm affection for Ruby. She knew herself ineffectual to stop her son. She relied on Ruby to do it, and, as she has succeeded, repays her with a love and devotion that before were wholly lacking. She would not open her heart to the girl—wilful little woman. Now, Ruby is all that is desirable in her eyes.

However, the harmony of things demanded that Mrs. Marshall should warm towards Ruby Cameron. The thing achieved, and the means of achieving it, are not invariably on the same plane. Though I have written as I have, I cannot say I should not have acted just as Ruby has, if I were in her place. And if I were Mrs. Marshall, I have a shrewd suspicion I should have done what Mrs. Marshall has done.

I have come to the conclusion, that a man who desires to become an airman, if he have sufficient experience of womenkind, never lets his womenkind decide this matter for him. And probably many a man is stopped by a woman.

Do you sufficiently realize the fact that it is June in England? that the days are subtly scented with elder blossom? To me it is one of the most cunning and appreciative of scents. It grips me with its

witchery more than do the scents of clover, or pinks, or lilacs, or even wild roses—all June scents. The June breezes that are laden with its fragrance catch at my heart as I ride along the Pedlar's Way, where the luscious, laden elders grow in the hedgerows for miles.

Yesterday, I found myself looking over the gateway of a ridiculously small churchyard. It, too, had elder bushes in its boundary hedge. I like to peep into empty churches if I find them standing open for an airing. When, therefore, an old man weeding in the pathway remarked:

"The door stand open if yer 'ud like to step inside, Mam!"

I did step inside, the old man holding the Great Auk, and found a beautiful tomb of fifteenth century erection.

Afterwards, I stood talking to the man of many moons for a little.

"Did yer mind the pulpit?" he asked, and added, "Yer expects to hear nought but the Scriptures expounded from there, do yer?"

I acquiesced that pulpits were erected for that sole purpose.

"That may be! but it happened once I heerd somethin' curious, when I was a young man, from that there pulpit. The sarmon was finished, and the blessin' given. Old parson allus spoke it from the pulpit. Martin Morgan stood up to go out o' church, and parson, still i' the pulpit, calls out to him:

'Martin! I say, Martin, if this here dry weather holds, we'll be arter the hay fust thing i' the mornin', so you let t'others know!' Farmed the glebe hisself, he did.

"Seemed out o' place, Mam, to speak o' sich matters. Med a rare impression on my mind, ter did. Fifty years arter, I remembers it, as ter day it was spoken. The old parson and Martin Morgan been dead and buried many years, they hev."

I went and looked at the 'old parson's' grave. It was weather-worn and neglected, and forgotten. I could not even read the inscription upon it. I gathered a bunch of elder flowers and laid them on the mound, with its long, uncut grass.

"The graves o' them as hev neither wife nor childer, in gineral gits neglected, Mam. The old parson lived alone, and died alone. He hadn't even a relation to come to his burial, and what money he had, he left to the por. He was a good man, was the old parson, and a rare scholard."

It seems to me I read much between the lines in the old man's words, even the epitome of a life.

I must not forget to tell you of the picturesque and artistic event of the day, here at the Manor Farm. In each district is a gang of sheep shearers. The members may be farm labourers at other seasons; during the sheep-shearing season they go from farm to farm. To-day, they have worked here. There is great life, and movement, and merriment as the white clad figures bend to their arduous task. The sheep

struggle, and actively object to be shorn—and, where the catching of animals is involved, there is naturally excitement, laughter, and subject for joke. One man shears from five and twenty to thirty fleeces in the day.

Shearing is not altogether without its danger. A year or two ago, a man cut an artery in his thigh dealing with a refractory sheep. One of his fellows applied a wad of wool to the wound. Blood poisoning set in, and the man died. There is talk of using machinery that will shear a sheep in five minutes. I trust it will not be general. I love these picturesque scenes—the 'company' clad in white from top to toe, clean white, too, early in the day, at their old-world craft, the sound of the sharpening of shears, the bark of dogs, the remonstrances of the sheep, the men's voices make this great open-fronted waggon-shed a delicious scene. A painter would find it a strenuous subject. A freshly shorn ewe is not a beautiful object. I wonder what the lambs think of their poor mothers when they rejoin them. Shearing must be a great insult from a dignified old ewe's point of view.

I scarcely know why I have left it to the end of my letter to tell you a bit of news. This morning, two letters were received at the Manor Farm from Felix Harridon. To John Wartley he wrote asking if he might come down for a few days. And to me he wrote: "I am no longer face to face with the knowledge that every day I am a likely candidate for a coffin." In other words he is completely restored to health—'tough and robust' he calls himself.

"I have taken immense pains to achieve this," he writes, "and when I see you I shall tell you why. I shall not let you off that day by the sea, any more than I did the—our—Primrose Picnic."

He wants to come this week.

XLVI.

June, 12th.

DEAR one, my letter this mail is not that of the keen onlooker, who is often amused, and always absurdly interested in her surroundings. This time the onlooker becomes one of the principal characters. Big events, so far as my puny little life is concerned, have happened since my last letter. Joan Cantley does not belong to herself any longer. Somebody came and asked her for herself, and, like the meek little person she is, she gave herself away. That is the news in a nutshell, but you must have a longer version of the story. There is much I cannot put into actual and definite language, but read between the lines, and in your heart exclaim: 'God bless you, Joan!'

My heart is attuned to a great happiness, a wonderful symphony is being played in my soul.

Felix Harridon followed John Wartley's reply with express speed. I saw at a glance that he was not in his Primrose Picnic mood, but in one less fantastic, and more robust. Alec and Sonny acclaimed him—there was an affectionate meeting on the platform. It is to Felix an entirely novel experience to be with

young children. It exhilarates him, and he catches something from them that eminently becomes him.

He arrived with cut and dried plans in his mind.

"To-morrow," he announced, "I want to get my footing among you all again, and to fall into step. The next day"—he looked at *me* though he spoke to us collectively—"I mean to paint red by making trippers of Miss Cantley and myself."

He turned to Granny Wartley.

"I gave her due notice that I should humbly request her to label herself tripper for one June day," he said.

"Labelled parcels always reach their destination," the old lady answered quizzically.

The next day came—and went—a blue June day, azure sky above, and buttercups in all the meadows below—we walked through them. And the next day came, bluer, serener than its yesterday, a day God must have loved to have made.

We went off as the clock struck eight—walking to the station. That was my idea, and Felix acquiesced. We went by ancient rights-of-way through fields. At this early hour, there are revelations to us who do not know these hours, out of doors. There is a clarity and cleanness in the atmosphere. We rejoiced because we must. Our day at the sea lay before us.

Felix took the tickets with a jaunty air, positively *asked* for trippers' tickets. The public, however, consisted only of the booking clerk, a porter, and a deaf pig-dealer, so that no one was scandalised. We saw the sea miles before the train stopped, and the

sight created in us the glad emotion it never fails to excite in those who approach it from inland. There was a lazy incoming tide, and the colossal stretch of waters was lazy, glassy, and glistening in silvery greyness and warmth.

"I have dreamed of this day for months, it may be for years!" Felix said, as we walked along the cliff top, and he began to speak of his boyhood.

My knowledge of him has never previously gone back beyond the time when we first knew him. You will remember how seldom he speaks of himself. I have often wondered how he spent his childhood. I cherish a tremendous idea of the influence of a happy childhood on the whole after life of a man or woman. Felix' childhood was a singularly happy one, if rather lonely. There was himself and an elder brother. He says the sight of Alec and Sonny takes him back to his own early days, when he worshipped and imitated the elder, Philip, in all his ways. It was just as Felix was on the eve of leaving school that trouble came ; Philip died. He was thrown from his horse, and picked up—dead. The shock killed his mother. She survived less than a month—and Felix adored her.

From Eton he went to Oxford—then, business. The publishing firm of Harridon and Blake has been established well over a hundred years, and never yet has failed a son to succeed his father.

It was a very quiet household to which Felix returned. His father's sister kept house for her

brother ; she cared little for entertaining, and was a martyr to rheumatism.

Felix declares it was not wonderful if he grew old and sober-minded before his time. The really beautiful feature of his life was the affection between himself and his father. The elder Mr. Harridon was more than forty years older than his son, yet for his son's sake, the fine old man refused to grow old. He made a desperate effort to keep his youthfulness, and he kept it. He had a boy's zest, and a boy's buoyancy. It was rather noble, I think, Keith. The two rode together every morning before breakfast, then would come the day's business, and in the evening it was generally, billiards. Felix says he owes everything to his father. He was a man, who seemingly must have an idol. It was his wife, while she lived ; his son, after her death. In teaching him to ride straight, to shoot, to conduct a great business on lines of strictest integrity, he taught him the manly qualities that lie behind these things.

Once, Felix thought there was a likelihood of his father's second marriage, but he was mistaken, and the life I have described continued to his father's death. This was the year we made his acquaintance.

He puts it thus :

"A funny thing I should have felt a burning curiosity to see the writer of *Joy Threadgold*. I realized the story was not up to concert pitch, but it was human—a living document. It glowed with keenness, and the love of life. It was no use signing

yourself 'George Watson.' The writer was woman to the core, and there was no disguising the fact."

"But you came to make sure; you asked for Mr. George Watson," I maintained.

"I came to see the woman who called herself thus," he said. "Hush!" he added—"don't joke . . . Joan!"

He made me look at him—and I saw—I understood.

What words did you use to tell your Katharine you loved her? Felix used scarcely any.

I can go no farther in blank, bald words. I could only put into organ notes that for which I find no words. And so—an interlude—a silence in my letter—a pause.

.

You know Felix. You know me. I have told you of the hazy sea-setting. The strange, beautiful part of it all is, that he would have said what he said long ago but for two things. Paul had been his friend from their Oxford days, and he would not become his rival. And later, when he heard from my own lips that I should never marry Paul, his health had given way, and he would not ask me to become his wife while—as he puts it—he was a "likely candidate for a coffin any day."

Now, the barrier of unspoken love is no longer between us. We need not hide our feelings from each other any more. As we sat with God's sea

beside us, it was as if some ineffable tenderness was about us, indulgent, glad, approving.

Felix reminded me of that night when we had stood in the porch to hear the brown owl's hooting.

"It was all I could do not to take you in my arms," he confessed, and then added: "I dared not risk stirring your dear pity, for at that time I do not suppose Doctor Western would have given much for my chances of living. You might have married me for pity, Joan."

Not for pity only, I think.

We reached the Manor Farm before the sun set. And from the station to the house our way lay westward. Golden sunset met us all the way to the farm. Felix led me straight to Granny Wartley. I think she guessed the truth so soon as she set eyes upon us; anyway, Felix hastened to tell her.

"We have no mothers to rejoice over us, so we come to you!" he said whimsically.

His words, for a moment, made her lips quiver, but with smiling eyes she held our two hands clasped in hers. She was tender, and loving, and of course she told us: "I knew how it was long ago."

She bade Felix care for me tenderly all my days, and she bade me cherish him for the good man he is. Then John Wartley and his wife came in, and they, too, rejoiced in our happiness. Life's adventure has its exquisite moments, Keith—and this day was all I would have it be—joyous, simple, poetic.

Have my letters to you betrayed the poor, loving

heart I have carried? Have they hidden, or have they disclosed my love, my fears, my jealousy? I do not know when I did not love Felix in these last eight years. I could marry him or none, or not marry him as the fates willed, but I must love him through all my days.

I am inordinately glad that he is friend and lover too. This eight years of friendship is a mine of pleasant memories. Felix says the woman he loves must ever be his ideal. I am aghast. I know myself too well to dream myself any man's ideal.

June, 13th. Keith dear, the gayest happiness has a streak of sadness cutting into it. The sadness with me is the part I have played in Bob Ingleby's life. I wanted him to hear my news first of all from my own lips. I came upon him this morning in one of his fields—and I told him. He looked down at me, and took my hands and wished me all the good wishes. But my heart was wrung; he was so strong, so knightly. I have no other word but that to use. I came home and threw myself on my bed and sobbed for pity. If he had been less kind, less cheery, less concerned to hide his feelings from me, I should have been less saddened.

XLVII.

June, 18th.

Since my last mail day I have had a week in which to meditate. The trend of my meditation has been after this fashion. Have I the power to make Felix happy? Disturbing thought number two—am I a selfish, self-centred woman? Whatever answer I make to such questions, I am bound to ask them, and, after heart searching, to answer them as truly as I may.

I know the happiest married couples are those who are imbued with a reasonable, sane philosophy of life. It is not enough for one of a couple to have it ; both must possess it, and practice it.

I want to make double harness easy going for Felix. To this intent, I will harbour no grievances—they are the miasma of life. I knew a woman once, who made deliberate shipwreck of her life by nursing grievances. I shall blow them to the wind. I want to come to a serene old age as Granny Wartley has done. I believe she has a working formula which runs: "Do whatever you have to do and never ask yourself if you like it or not." I will strive to live up to that.

I wonder how your thoughts ran the week following your engagement?

Felix went to town yesterday. We have enjoyed one dear, intimate week. We rode over to tell Sir Samuel and Sybil Reid. She was radiantly pleased. Actually, Felix had already taken her into his confidence at Christmas time, when I refused to make her acquaintance. She has long ago forgiven me. She never saw there was anything to forgive, gracious woman that she is.

I think her friendship for Felix is very like mine for Bob Ingleby. It is with us both a factor in our lives, something to be cherished. Sybil knew Felix when she was a child, as I knew Bob. And when a child-boy and child-girl have loved each other with their wholly childish love, it makes for friendships such as ours. But everyone does not understand.

This is enough of myself. While people are saying to me—when is the wedding to be? I am forgetting to tell you Richard Marshall and Ruby are to be married—at Pelton after all—next week. It will be a quiet wedding, and there can be no misgiving as to their future happiness.

It is amusing that the older generation—Mr. and Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Cameron—are oblivious to that rapt look on the girl's face.

I wish for Ruby's sake, however, that Mrs. Cameron could have eyes to see and heart to feel, and soul to rejoice with her. In a little while after her marriage, Ruby will be going with her husband

to India—and perhaps her mother will never understand.

There are other bells than marriage bells. Even this morning I listened to the 'passing bell.' The little Rachel died to-day. I have been to the cottage. Martha sent for me. She wanted me to see the little quiet placid body in its death sleep.

I have never seen a child dead, before, and a dead child looks farther from life than do grown people. Martha has fought her grief so long, already, that now she bears it very quietly. The awe which ever surrounds the mystery of death is upon her, and upon those with her.

"I've known it was comin', and I must bear it, and I will bear it for the sake o' the livin'."

She said this to me as I bade her good-bye. The sun has shone from early dawn; not a cloud has passed over the blue. It has always been a disquieting thought to me—that dead, we must miss our sunshine. Suddenly, as I walked, it came to me—perhaps the dead enjoy it still, somehow, somewhere.

The other day I read Alexander Smith's *Dreamthorpe*. It is good reading, this aping of the greybeard, by a man of three and thirty. Yet death is stalking close at his heels, and you read, in spite of himself, a fear of it. He would make light of it, and quote Montaigne to you, but the fear is on his soul. I love Alexander Smith greatly for his choice of adjectives—they are happy inspirations in many cases—he speaks of the *heathery* parts of human

nature, and the stream that *trots*. And he will have it that Charles Lamb's Essays are "scented with the primroses of Covent Garden."

If I were to let myself go I should return to the subject of Felix and myself. One of the self-revealing confessions he has made is, that he is no longer burdened with a sense of loneliness. It has fallen from him, and its place is taken by a genial assurance that a woman lives who treasures his confidence. Poor old Felix! I am thankful that at least I have done thus much for him.

It has been a delightful thing to receive congratulations. I have told you of the Reids and the Wartleys. Mrs. Marshall was hearty and motherly, and touched me with her sincerity. Mrs. Cameron was voluble. She never expresses a thought concisely. With her organizing powers, and her grip of affairs, it seems scarcely characteristic. It is one of the surprises of her nature. Margaret Derston does not fail me in my happiness. In saying that I mean much.

Everyone agrees that Felix is a proper and gallant gentleman. I am glad I shall henceforth view life with eyes that have seen life here at Pelton—its joys, its sorrows. I am learning much the town never taught me. The days are filled with the scent of clover, and white pinks—and in a few days more they will begin to cut the hay. The lambs have lost their tails this several weeks now. The young foals and their mothers tempt me, day by day, to note their attitudes as they pass their days in the meadows. Young

birds haunt the garden. I have lost my heart to the fidelity of a young gander. He is scarcely fledged yet. He was reared by mistake in a sitting of duck's eggs, and was put in a coop with the ducklings and the hen-mother. He grew so quickly that soon he could not squeeze himself between the bars of the coop. Since then he lays himself, at bedtime, outside, and puts inside just as much of himself as will go. Even the stolid but tender hearted Albert is touched at the sight of the clumsy, faithful bird. It was he who first took me to see him.

I am for ever getting my heart strings pulled, here at Pelton, by little touching things like that. It happened here last week that one poor sheep filled my heart with pity. It was the one in the whole flock that could not be kept in bounds. It would have been nothing in a wilder, less enclosed district. But here sheep are quiet, well fed creatures, content with hedged-in fields, or enclosed folds. Only this one felt unrest, and life not wide enough. The roaming spirit of some forebear was in it. One day it jumped its fold boundaries into green, luscious fodder; animals may not eat unsparingly of growing vetches. They came upon it—dead. It was a vagabond, fretting at limitations. But, surely it owed a greater debt to life than its quiet law-abiding fellows. It tasted sweets and yearnings the others knew not. Vagabonds, human or beast, are oftentimes the lovable beings of their kind.

My book is finished, and despatched—not to Felix.

In this one thing I desire to stand alone. The fear assails me, that however poor the work may be, Felix would publish it for love of the author. This may not be. If the book be unworthy the English public, I trust it will be returned to me. It must be worth publishing or it must be consigned to the flames. Felix would no longer bring to it an unbiassed opinion —*ergo*, Felix must not be asked to judge it. He does not know what I have done—when the matter is settled, I will beg his forgiveness. I rather enjoy having this secret from him. Women and children know to the full the delight of wilfulness, and I am so sure of his love for me, and of mine for him, that I dare this thing with impunity. When he knows the truth I trust my love to commend me.

XLVIII.

June, 25th.

Wedding bells rang out in their own inimitable way on midsummer day. The village was festive from end to end; it was the marriage day of Ruby Cameron and Richard Marshall, or, as my wilful fancy will have it—Helöise and Abelard. The same spirit worked in many that day to be gay and blythe: we had responsive smiles for all and sundry, and a great feeling of friendship for each other.

Girlish and fair and fragile—tall and bronzed and stalwart—were Helöise and Abelard as they joined hands before God's altar.

I can say no more than I have of the greatness of the love of these two, lest I become too insistent. Only I must add Widow West's remark.

"He worship the ground she tread over," cried she heartily, and indicated bride and bridegroom by admiring glances at them both. And truly, to see Richard Marshall lead his wife down the aisle was to realize the pride of a man. The vicar performed the ceremony in a charming, fatherly manner, and Basil Cameron gave his sister away. Time was

getting on, and the feminine mind rejoices that the wedding has taken place for sartorial reasons. Mrs. Marshall, Mrs. Cameron, May Wartley, Margaret Derston and a goodly number of others have forborne to wear new summer gowns that they might first grace this occasion. The temptation no longer to keep them shut away was becoming irresistible.

Felix ran down for the day, buoyant in his new robustness, and during the ceremony he whispered:

"Shall we be married here at Pelton, Joan?"

I whispered back a demure—"Yes; please!"

Since then we have discussed the matter. Felix begs for a short engagement. He wants me to marry him at the close of my *green* year, which means in September.

A little quiet wedding with neither fuss nor fashion suits the temper of each of us. But what will my wedding seem without you?

Since the wedding day, it has rained morning, noon, and night for three and a half days. I chronicle this because I have learned to regard weather with a farmer's eyes. The greater part of the hay is cut. How merciful it would be if it could be carted as soon as cut. It is not so, and hay in cocks, and hay not yet cocked, but lying as it fell from the reapers, is having the goodness washed out of it. This is the third year the hay crop has been spoiled, and mouldy hay is poor feed for working horses. Neither John Wartley nor Bob Ingleby allow that it is ruined yet.

"If it would clear and we had a good sharp dry it might not be so bad!" they say doggedly.

But the sky is leaden, and on a low-lying field I saw hay *floating* on the flooded ground. We need a very wise philosophy to reconcile us to nature in her perverse moods.

The John Wartleys and Bob Inglebys of this world, by their conduct, preach to the community at large—For pity's sake show your world the cheerful side of yourselves. There is need for nobility of conduct here in the country-side among men who are at nature's mercy. The nobility is not lacking.

I should like you to see May Wartley in her summer garden when the sun shines. She is never in exuberant spirits, but among her flowers there comes to her a rapture as if the characters of the many flowers were conveyed to her.

"Oh, the sense of the mountain flower."

would have more than a vague meaning for her. It is her pleasure to discover the native country of her flowers. The fragile looking "Bleeding Heart" braving, as it does, a Siberian winter, draws her sympathy. There were pale mauve Primulas, she told me one March morning, which grew in their native haunts on the slopes of Himalayan mountains. Such things mean much to her.

She has what few flower lovers have—a little wild bit in a *sunny* spot, and here grow and flower in delightful riot, viper's bugloss, toad-flax and wild

pinks, lady's bed straw and wild rock-roses, and meadow sweet, white woodruff, and perhaps half a hundred more of sun-loving wildings.

She is so patient with her flowers. I almost feel they are aware of her lovingness.

Imagine this woman in her garden, Keith; then picture her shut away in miles of streets. How much of her would starve, or have gone undeveloped? The village children adore her. You must interest a child in some way before you can take his fancy, and she does interest them. They bring her tight little posies, and their delight is to witness her joy in them. They smile and dimple—these village children—and look indulgent. It is not in them to share such joy as hers, but it interests them. I compare May Wartley with no one I ever knew before. People you do not classify are always refreshing.

Picture my thrill of satisfaction, in my rôle of onlooker, at some news Mr. Marshall had for me this afternoon. At a distance, I felt the good man had something to impart. His good humour was assertive.

"You are interested in humanity—guess the latest shuffling of the cards of fate," he asked.

I never hazard chance guesses in that fashion. I never solved a riddle in my life, so I merely said: "Tell me." It answers all purposes.

"When a man plans, uses any diplomacy with which God has gifted him, he often fails. Once in a way, he succeeds," he said sapiently.

"You have succeeded," I hazarded.

"So far as putting the spoke in the wheel," he answered modestly. "You remember how I went to Davy Snow to put a certain idea into the slow old brain, which idea he fails to trace back to me. Again, I visit Widow West and seek to invoke a spark of pity in her, for the lonely man. The plan, if I may call it so, succeeds after due time for fermentation. A few hours ago Davy called to see me.

"'Sir,' said he, 'Bill Heskins and his young woman would git married come Michaelmas if there was a cottage to be had!'

"I suggested such a thing as an empty cottage might be available.

"Davy sat down and spread out his palms over his knees.

"'Yis! one of them mill housen *might* be empty. It'ud suit the young 'uns well. Four pounds a year rent, and good gardens to 'em. One of them housen *will* be empty, Sir!'

"He stood up again and touched his forelock.

"'Du yer see far enough to sight my meanin'?' he asked.

"Then the old man smiled; his face was one large, wide, glorified smile, and not a fleeting one at that.

"There was no mistaking his meaning, and I seized his hand.

"'Widder West is agreeable!' he muttered. 'Both on us be gettin' the pension, and I arns as much as a man may arne and git the pension as well!' And

with a bit of dry humour the old fellow muttered: 'and we're bein' charitable to the young 'uns at the same time, lettin' 'em into a tidy cottage Widder West ha' kep clean and papered this twenty year.'

"But it does not matter the words Davy used to enlighten me, it only matters that he is a different man—'Liza's ghost is laid."

Kindly, and delighted at his own diplomacy, the vicar gloated over his share in this affair. In this case he had told his wife what he had done on the occasion of his mentioning the name of Widow West to Davy. More often than not I am convinced he goes to work without confiding in her. He knows the inelasticity of his dear Augusta, and argues, I fancy, to the effect that she cannot object to what she knows not.

As I talked with Mr. Marshall, I discovered my thoughts had suddenly gone soaring overseas to Sorrento. It might have been some clearness of sky or atmosphere, or a benign look that swept over the vicar's face that reminded me of a certain kindly monk.

It must have been some stirring of memory or association that translated me. I must tell you the little episode to which I harked back—it is so lovable. I was staying in Sorrento, with Frank and Muriel Bell as companions. We drove one afternoon to an old convent transformed into an orphanage. As the door keeper threw open the door at our approach, we were welcomed by a courtly old monk with a large gentle face. We followed him up a staircase into a

big room, and then out upon the roof to gaze upon the most ingratiating and unforgettable scene I shall ever see.

"Sant Angelo!" the monk said, with tender inflection on the name.

He pointed to a mountain peak in the near distance, yet scarcely visible by reason of a heavy purple cloud that wrapped it round. Then he led us to the other side—this was to face the west—the setting sun lay there in cloudless sky.

"Ischia," murmured the monk, pointing to an island in its dazzling setting of glinting sunlit waters.

We retraced our steps, and again we faced Sant Angelo. The monk repeated the name. It was a fresh introduction, for, lo! the cloud had vanished: the peak was clear, and painted in delicate blues and purples before our wondering gaze.

I like to think of those influences on that old monk's life—they could not have been trivial or insignificant—to live *there*, the mountain on one side, the island in the western sea on the other. I think, perhaps, he was a very noble man by reason of these masterpieces of God's artistry. I keep this lovely memory as it were in lavender; it is to last into my old age—if old age is for me.

XLIX.

July, 1st.

I AM sad to write, the June of my green year is over. June means much to the human soul. July may be more equable, more summer-like, but in the abstract we lavish not the half of the affection and sentiment upon it that we feel for June. Someone has called July:

> "This silent month of the attaining year,
> So hugely dumb."

If I did not inwardly shudder at that ugly word 'educate,' I should use it for myself. I have been trying to learn, perhaps only the infinitely little things of earth. I feel the influences of these quiet folk upon my soul. And surely it is not wonderful, given a willing receptivity on my part, if the quiet serenity of the elder Mrs. Wartley, the gentleness of the younger, reflect on my more mercurial temperament. The widening and expanding that I feel is going on in John Wartley's soul, is, in different ways, working in me.

I wonder if you remember that Mr. Marshall

promised to tell me the story of Joshua Noll's five-acre patch. He had to make it a thing of the future, because his dear Augusta was present. The frequent repetition of the same story in her presence is to be avoided. Now, however, I have heard the story from Susan Noll, herself—it delighted me hugely, especially the manner of the telling.

Joshua's five-acre holding is a source of much quiet amusement to his wife.

"He is a curious man, is my husband, and that's a fact!" she said with indulgent discernment. "For years, yes, even from a lad he ha' had his eyes on that there Five Acre Patch, as we calls it. He niver thought to git it, seein' it belonged to Ebenezer Kyman, and no one expected he would part with it. It was only a dream o' Joshua's."

Susan sat knitting a blue stocking for Joshua, and the stocking had an ugly white length at the top, and a white heel, and I suspect a white toe to come. I sat by the window in a chair dusted, though speckless, with Susan's apron as she drew it forward.

"We never had no childer," she continued, and sighed, "and Joshua saved penny on penny, and allus with that dream in his mind.

"Well, Mam, Kyman lost his wife; and his daughter in Ameriky wrote and told him to rid himself of the land, and end his days with her.

"My man heerd tell on it, seein' 'twas common gossip, and I niver see him so touchy and irritable in my life, and that's sayin' a good deal."

She laughed softly.

"It were done by his tryin' to contain hisself. He was afeered to appear too eager to git the land, knowin' as he did Kyman was one who would drive a hard bargain ; but he was a'most past bearin'.

"Then, one night Kyman walked up the pathway and stepped into the kitchen, and them two old men set togither, and pothered and talked three hours and more. And I set i' the front room, hevin' the door open betwixt 'em a crack—and listened.

"'Tain't divulgin' no secrets I am, Miss, in telling. We often talks on it now. I was rarely entertained, alistenin' to 'em.

"Kyman says: 'It's good land, Noll, though I says it as shouldn't ; fust class land to handle, and lays wonderful handy for yer!'

"'Yis, bor, I knows, though it mightn't be every man's choosin',' says Joshua.

"Then Kyman takes a handful o' loose barley from his pocket and examines it.

"'It's wonderful good barley land,' he mutters.

"But Joshua wasn't to be hoodwinked.

"'Yer wants thirty pound an acre. That's dear, man, dearer than it had ought to be.'

"'Oh,' says Kyman, 'I ain't beggin' yer to take it. It's accommodation land, and as sich will fetch pretty much what I asks for it. Bill Todder is eager for it, besides two other offers I hev had!'

"Well, Miss, I set and laughed to myself as I listened. I knew my Joshua must be in a fever of

excitement, and I knew, too, the sum Ebenezer Kyman meant to have was a'most to five pounds what my husband had sefted. Joshua was as cute as t'other though!"

Susan's eyes danced with merriment.

"He says:

"'Tis a sight o' money to pass between us!'

"Kyman slapped his thigh.

"'Look 'er here, I won't be hard on yer, when it comes to the implements and covenances, Noll, man. I'll be aisy with yer,' he cries. 'I'll throw in the horse. You know the breed o' old Smiler; as good a bit o' horse flesh as ever stood i' the shafts.'

"Joshua guessed I was listenin' and he dustn't make the bargain too quick and easy. So he says, pondering:

"'Thuty pounds an acre is a big sum, Mr. Kyman. John yer head on yer—a thunderin' big sum.'

"Then Ebenezer says slow:

"'It'll make a landowner on yer, Noll!'

"As true as I sit here, Miss, I knew them words would do it. It was the dream o' my old man's life. He had worked for it, and sweated for it fifty years, and denied himself a'most the necessaries of life.

"They talked a bit longer, and Kyman rose to his feet, and says Joshua must let him know his decision by the end o' the week, and he adds in his cunnin' way:

"'I dersay Bill Todder would make 'em guineas 'stead o' pounds.'

"But my man was even wie him.

"'Bill Todder,' says he, 'wouldn't keep the land clean, and do well by it, as I should. I shouldn't go for to overburden it. You'd never be hearin' it was foul wie twitch if I had the doin' on it.'

"'Well,' says Kyman, 'I ha' given yer fust offer, rememberin' some words that passed betwixt us years ago. Yer can take it or leave it at thuty pound an acre.'

"He brought his old stick down like a crowbar, and walked away down the path.

"I found my old man all of a tremble, and he was a mumblin' to hisself:

"'Tak all my savins, ter will, and my father's afore me.'

"Then he turns to me, silly and coaxing-like.

"'Shall I make myself a landowner, Susan, mor?'

"He seemed half dazed and unsensed now the dream was liklies to come true.

"'I laid it up to one hundert and *eighty* pounds he'd take, and not a penny less, so I h'ain't been done, Susan. And I ha' got th' old horse for luck.'

"After a time, nothin' would please him, but I should put my shawl over my head and walk along o' him, and have a look at the land—as if I didn't know it as well as my own garden."

Susan pulled her ball of wool towards her.

"Talk of women bein' kittle cattle, my dear young lady, men are all that and much more. And sometimes it isn't what they is, but what they isn't"; with which ambiguity she expected me to acquiesce.

"This was the biggest thing my old man ever set his mind to, a sight bigger than choosin' me for his wife had ever been. That came natural like, seein' we was neighbours and we had walked home from church, Sunday nights, from children, togither. 'Twas a Sunday night we settled it."

But the reminiscences of her courting could not keep Susan back from the 'bigger thing' of their joint lives.

"So we walked down the green lane, and the Five Acre Patch lay before us. We stood and leaned over the gate. 'Twas a bit chilly, but I had to stand there and listen while my old man built a pig stye in the corner, and sowed a crop a barley, aye, and reaped it, too, and fed it to his pigs, and fatted 'em, and sold 'em. He was wonderful elated, he was, and his old lips was twitchin' and his ears was burnin'. He was all in a turmoil, that's a fact.

"'I ha' had it a long time in my mind, Susan, h'ain't I?' he says.

"And I put my hand on his arm and telled him:

"'Yis, yis,' I says; 'asavin' up for them there five acres ha' made up for the lack o' childer, hevn't it, though it h'ain't to me.'

"'I don't know that it h'ain't,' he allowed.

Susan sighed, as I think she must have sighed at the time she heard those words spoken. The sorrow of being a childless wife is the big sorrow of her humble life.

"Then, Mam, we went home and to bed. Joshua

would hev given a good deal to have closed the bargain wie Ebenezer there and then afore he slept, but he'd been given to the end o' the week, and to the end o' the week he 'ud take.

"There warn't no sleep for us that night. Joshua went all over it agin, and agin. We heard the church clock strike ivery hour. When it was gettin' light, Joshua set up i' the bed, and he says:

"'Don't yer disturb yourself, I'm jest goin' to ope the old chest, and look at the money notes.'

"'They's safe enough!' I telled him.

"'Well,' he says, ''tain't so much that, but I shan't hev 'em long. They won't be lyin' there under my Sunday clothes, they'll belong to Ebenezer Kyman.'"

Susan was warming to her climax.

"I couldn't keep him abed no how. He ups and takes the key from the chiny ornament on the mantelpiece, and he goes down on his bare knees afore the old chest, that was as old, it was a'most touchwood, 'twas that wormeaten. I was main ashamed of it, and I had threatened to cut it up for fire wood. But he contended it held his clothes handy, and his bank notes. He reckoned they was safer there than in the bank.

"He unlocks it, and he pulled up his Sunday coat, and goes to take the notes.

"I heered a noise—a swearin' and a shriek, and I saw Joshua all of a heap over the chest. Thought he'd been seized with a stroke, that I did—and I runned to him.

"My dear young lady, he was a swearin' and blasphemin' somethin' awful, enough to take the roof off the house, and to call the Almighty's judgment down upon him that minute.

"A mouse had made her nest o' them banknotes; nibbled 'em into fragments and scraps yer could scarcely git hold on.

"'There ain't no land for us now!' Joshua cried.

"I dustn't look into his face, it was that terrible. I shall never know how we passed the hours till it was time to git about. Joshua said he would go out and drown hisself, and I thought he would. He was a'most out of his senses. I jist had to coax him, and fondle him like a child, and lay my old face agin his, and talk a sight o' foolish talk.

"We went to the parson fust thing, and carried the scraps to witness for us the notes had been there."

Susan laughed.

"We *can* laugh over it now, but it was a terrible experience for us, and sometimes it's a nightmare yit. The parson, bless him, got us our rights and we was able to change them scraps for gold."

Susan ended with:

"You'll forgive me for tellin' yer all this, Miss."

I certainly should not have forgiven her if she had not. I had often seen Joshua at work on his land. He is one of those who succeed—and he is a landowner. And every Sunday, I see Susan and Joshua in church—very clean, very worthy, very respectable. Henceforth, the sight of them will remind me of

that eventful night in their lives—quiet old Joshua " swearin' and blasphemin' somethin' awful." Joshua is a little spare man. Susan, on the other hand, is amply made, and wears a chenille net, and a black alpaca apron.

L.

July, 7th.

It is the high tide of summer.

The full flood of it fills my being, the spirit of it wraps me round. I did not know the seasons could be thus much to a human being.

A portion of my gladness these days is in the presence of great clumps of Madonna lilies, all in white bloom. Last winter, I watched their fresh, assertive green, then the flower stems rose, and now have come the lily flowers.

I hear music ; I see pictures with some inner vision. I listen to great anthems, yet no instrument is touched, no brush works, no pen writes the epics that are written on the country-side.

The hay-making is nearly over. The dry hay scent, the luscious smell of clover have clung about the days—also, the weary scent of mouldiness in the hay made my heart ache. But it was not all like that, and a portion was garnered in splendid condition, for which thing's sake, John Wartley, and Bob Ingleby, and others, cheerfully minimise the evil. A wide experience of life creates in us a depth of love and

sympathy, and the glad knowledge of the dignity of life. It makes men treasure the good and become more tolerant of the evil.

We might, oftener than we do, take a day to experiment with life. This is what I did yesterday. I said to myself: "I will go out and live my day as a wayfarer, and discover what thoughts and happenings the day shall bring."

I was an adventurer, and a light-hearted one at that. Should I go afoot or let the Great Auk carry me?

Chance decided. I tossed a penny.

Heads I went on my feet, tails I rode!

The penny decided that I walked.

Within a little I had started.

"I will go from field to field," I said softly.

Sometimes, there were the narrowest of paths, right through corn fields, and I felt the whip of the heavy ears, each side, as I passed along. Sometimes, I went by the headlands close to the hedgerows. There were wild campanulas in flower in the hedgebanks, and reaching out from the hedges, the honeysuckle was in the heyday of her beauty. In the ditches are ranks of willow herb—the old, bright, magenta colour—and meadow sweet.

I wandered through an Osier plantation, wet in places, and I had to retrace my steps. I was not sorry, for I felt lonely there. I came through a long chain of meadows, and I reached, presently, some field-barn premises and a couple of cottages beside them.

"Honey for sale. Sixpence a pound!" were the

words displayed on a card within the window of one.

"Honey and bread for luncheon!" I said to myself.

I bought the honey and was given the bread, and I picniced. The honey was in the comb.

Henry Ryecroft had something to say of honey, I think. It had for him delightful literary association, and carried him back to old Greek classics. I remember how gladly I carried off that idea of literary association when I read the book. It has been a fund of enjoyment to me ever since. Lavender always reminds me of the dear old Walton, and his "Let's go to that house, for the linen looks white and smells of lavender, and I long to lie in a pair of sheets that smell so."

At the Manor Farm all the linen smells—of lavender. The woman at the cottage was loquacious. She gave me bee lore much the same as Albert does, and she picked me a cottage garden nosegay—sweet williams and valerian, marigolds and pansies, and blue larkspur.

And I came home in quiet stillness, with lovely lights and shadows about me, for the sun sank, and the shadows could never be taller than then they were. I have no sort of news to tell you this week—the summer is in my heart.

LI.

July, 15th.

I HAVE grown familiar with the summer nights. My window is large and rather low. My bed has been drawn across it. I sleep with no blind, and the window thrown up from the bottom. I can put out my arm—into the night. The starlit nights, the moonlight nights, and the deeper, darker, unlit nights are, all of them, stored in my memory. Last night, soft, surging summer lightning was incessant—then more fitful, like silent signals from the vast beyond. The sunrise wakes me. I watch it—flooding through trees, under their branches, and lighting upon bracken, the orchard grass, and so across the garden. I shall go back to blinds, and curtains, and the bed a reasonable distance from the window, but—to the end—I shall know what these things mean. The silent nights, their intimate suppression of the gaiety of the day, their solitude, their aloofness, colour something in my trend of thought this summertime.

The glamour of them is like something grey and beautiful and tender—and very restful. They are God-made nights.

I suppose the invalid brother-in-law of old Corporal

Barker has been the incubus of his latter years. Three days ago he died. The man suffered much, and complained much. He regarded his pain as a personal outrage, and was never known to practise patience. Often, the cottage was a pandemonium of groans, oaths, vituperation, and abuse. Now, upon the cottage, and his widow, and brother-in-law have come the ultimate blessing of peace and quiet. There was the chronic disease the man suffered from. Then bronchitis attacked him, followed by pneumonia. The village description as to the cause of death is startling and original—"the three diseases met," and it was this actual meeting that cost the man his life. The dear old Corporal is ready—far too ready—to sacrifice himself, the widow very meek, and likewise self-sacrificing, so that I felt a great longing to ease the burden for them. The dead man was not insured. I have arranged to pay for the modest funeral. To win heart-felt gratitude such as I have won, just melted my heart. After what has been, I yearn to know this old brother and sister have a great peace for these closing years—there is a wonderful love and sympathy between them. They will realize this better than they have done, for the querulous invalid has demanded almost everything that was articulate, and able to be expended, for himself. I acknowledge I judge this dead being hardly. But if uncharitable, it is true, and to oppress the meek is an unpardonable crime. Later on, I will atone for my lack of charity by putting up a stone to

the dead man's memory, but simply because the dear old couple will deny themselves, and do without this and that to accomplish it, if I do not.

I come now to something of sterner mould. Keith, I suppose often we become what we least expect ourselves to become. You remember how self-righteous was Tom Priestly's wife when Tom Priestly was in disgrace and haled before the magistrates for poaching. The woman's fetish was her respectability, and the respectability of her forefathers. The time has come when she has flung it from her. In a word, she has deserted her husband, and thrown in her lot with that of a pedlar scissor and knife grinder. It is supposed the two are tramping the dusty summer roads together.

If she had done this thing while Tom was himself the reprobate, her little world would have said: "he drove her to it." They cannot say that now, for Tom was bravely paying off his life-long debt of gratitude to Bob Ingleby and Sir Samuel, as only an honourable man could. He had risen splendidly to the trust reposed in him. His wife had so far stretched her narrow, feeble nature as to forgive him, and to cease from continual reminders of his backsliding. They had lived quite happily—she, forgiving grudgingly, he, forgiven, and humbly grateful for the fact.

Then evil came. This scissor grinder, a wily, handsome vagabond, in love with idleness, utterly careless and conscienceless, bethought him to idle the summer months in an empty cottage in close proxi-

mity to Tom Priestly's home. He went a round of scissor grinding when he wanted bread, and when he had enough he dallied idly through the summer days. This is the result. She has taken her baby with her, but Tom is left with the other children. Remorse for his own past misdemeanours tempers his indignation. He has not self-righteousness to back him as his wife had. The irony of the situation does not strike him, even the disgrace is outweighed by his sense of helplessness. He is a man down, nonplussed, with no child old enough to turn housewife. The situation is pitiful. I try to reconstruct the affair from her point of view. I wonder—did she palliate the temptation by regarding it as a retaliation for what Tom had done? Had she motive at all?

I doubt if Clara Priestly reasoned the matter. The vagabond drew a picture of summer freedom, and so beguiled her.

You will hear I expect by this mail of the death of our cousin, Robert Keith Cantley. I heard of it only after the preceding part of my letter was written, or it should have had a far more important place than the tail end of my epistle. I have been telling myself, ever since the news came, that only the stricken life of poor Robert's father stands between Keith and the grand old title and estate. I hope it will be long before this huge responsibility be thrust upon you.

I love you so very well as the soldier-student. You recall names like Lovelace and Sidney to my mind—and your life is full and responsible as it is.

LII.

July, 21st.

KEITH! Keith! Keith! Felix sent IT to me yesterday. IT leaves me breathless. I turned the delicate volume out of its wrappings and read—"By Keith Cantley," and naturally the publishers—"Harridon and Blake." And so you have both kept this secret from me, and I am filled with the childish delight of a great surprise. Of the contents—poems, essays, fancies, things seen, and things felt—I will try to tell you what I think. Such titles as 'Indian Nights,' 'Frontier Strife,' 'Jungle,' 'Pathan,' 'Hunted,' 'Beyond the Wall,' 'The Silent Charge,' make a direct appeal to me. I have tried to read in the spirit in which the book was written. I am in India. I feel its glamour, its weariness, its worship, its torture, its strength, its helplessness. I have been with you —in India. You have searched the wild places, the strong places, and their power over you has forced itself into a beautiful utterance.

Felix notices a wealth of stern energy, of soldier-like vigilance. I try to judge as I would judge a stranger, and I am forced to cry "Well done," for

when a reader recognises such qualities as restraint, stern discipline, an inward passion for strength and beauty, he finds something beyond words, the confluence, the mystery that lie just beyond his reach, but not beyond his vague conveyance to the spirit. You appeal to the inner eyes, the inner hearing, and with it all you are manly and wholesome, and very glad at heart. You paint with bold colouring, and you do not lose the humour of life's wayfaring. My book will be pale and flat beside yours. I wish I had a humorous soul. Those who have a sense of humour have also the gift of being able to make their eyes smile. Even the unimpressionable Aunt Mary remembers that of you from your earliest days. She says our grandfather named you "Laughing Eyes."

Now, I must tell of the event that is stirring all Pelton to a happy, bubbling excitement. The very atmosphere of the place is agitated with ripples of sympathetic heart beats. It is all because Peter, the blacksmith, has brought home his wife—the little postmistress of that lone Canadian town.

"In my own mind, I had buried Alice Travers years ago!" says Susan Noll piously.

As usual it is left for Martha Heskins to say the really illuminating thing.

"It isn't given to many to have the sun stand still for them, and then to shine like noonday in the evening of their lives."

The bells peeled, the church flag was hoisted, windows displayed bits of bunting, or handkerchiefs,

or gay tablecloths—"anything to give a bit of welcome" as the women said—and there was scarcely a soul who had a spiteful, grudging word to say. We were festive, and we felt it, and like the festive bees when they swarm, the whole community was good tempered.

We were all there to see the triumphant homecoming of the proud, rejoicing Peter and his bride, and to wish them good luck.

Next to bride and bridegroom, the most important person in the parish is Martha's sister, Maria Ireton, the mother of that Jimmy Ireton who found Alice Travers. No wonder she is important; she carries in her pocket a letter from her boy with a full account of the wedding. And isn't it a proud thing, enough to elate the meekest soul, to be the one person of the community who can give authentic news concerning an event that is the topic of the hour? Of course it is, and Maria is sought out, and made much of, and treated with the special respect due to the position. She revels in this adulation, and was delighted when I overtook her the day after the return, and walked the road with her.

"My boy Jimmy brought it all about, yer sees, and I hev had a beautiful letter from him. Would yer like to read it, Miss?" she asked in breathless haste.

It was out of her pocket as she spoke.

"He jist can write a letter, Miss! Seems as if I can a'most see Peter, as proud as the cock on the

weather vane, same as my boy says he war, and that quiet little body beside him, as they went adown the church."

I read:

"We shan't know until she has left us what we fellows will miss by her goin'. She made every man among us think of his mother. She was that discernin', too. She knowed which on us was hevin a hand to hand struggle for a livin', and which was agoin' strong, and she was just a little grey angel to us all. Some o' the chaps called her their Sister of Mercy. There be some she have nursed in sickness, and some she hev comforted in sorrow, and it goes hard with all of us to let her go.

"All as could, rode into the town to see the weddin'. She was right overcome to see us, and to listen to the cheerin' we give her. We made as merry as we could, and that ain't sayin' a little, mother. But it be hard to let her go, and the place will feel lonesome without her."

Such, Keith, is the little woman who has the sunshine in the evening of her life—as Martha put it. And this morning I came upon Peter himself. He seems to step to music, his eyes are bright, he is brisk, and alert, and proud—as proud as success can make a man. There is not a living soul with whom he would change places.

"I never expected happiness, Miss, and I can scarce contend with it," he says soberly. And then, with all the joy and happiness declaring itself, he added:

"And what a woman I ha' got, and thank God I knows it. I tell yer, Miss, them young fellows over the water worshipped her. She was that interested in 'em, and fond on 'em, that when one on 'em had no letters from home—and he that eager for 'em and aridin' twenty miles for to git 'em—she jes set herself down and wrote herself to his people to beg and pray on 'em to write. She says she knew she was takin' a liberty, but she jes' couldn't help it. That's the woman I ha' got."

And Peter would have me go in and make his wife's acquaintance. I found a thin, faded, little woman, with deep, wonderful eyes, and the sweetest mouth I ever saw.

The thought came to me, that the grief that long ago had driven her forth had not been uncrowned with significant blessing.

She smiled at me, and she was a little shy, and left Peter and me to do most of the talking. Yet this little woman had been the mother-spirit of that lone district. She had watched home-sickness such as may well have stirred the depths in her. She had watched men that were almost boys, some of them, fighting against fierce odds. She had watched characters growing wider and nobler, and others going under in pitiful deterioration.

LIII.

July, 30th.

Really, the burden of my letters, latterly, seems to be marrying and giving in marriage. I have, to-day, to add to the number of weddings. The vicar says it is a record number in Pelton for ten years at least. This time, groom and bride are not youthful, for groom is Davy Snow, and bride is Widow West. They were married a week ago at eight o'clock in the morning. No one guessed what was happening until the bells pealed merrily. This was Davy's huge joke.

"Folks will put their heads out o' doors to ask their neighbour what them there bells are thinkin' of, to ding, dong, that fashion. And they'll sight us two walkin' home up the street. That'll be my way o' tellin' 'em I ha' took a wife. But I warn't goin' to hev folks chaffin' and laughin' at me aforehand!"

And it all happened as Davy surmised.

Last evening, I met him beside his own gate.

"Come in, come you in, Miss—*she*"—he did not distinguish his wife more definitely than with the expressive *she*—"will be rarely glad to see yer!"

He threw open the door, with a look of honest pride and contentment, and a little smiling woman came forward and dusted a chair for me.

The house looked sweet and clean and neat, as it has not looked in my recollection. The sight of the old smiling couple, proud and happy, gripped my heart.

"She jist can make beautiful meat dumplins," Davy declared.

"He's aisy pleased!" the woman told me.

Even Sandy looks relieved, and a gay dog again.

"Davy gits less mure hearted ivery day!" she said softly as I came away, and Davy stepped forward to open the gate for me.

And at the gate Davy confided:

"It war a good day for me when I brought her home. Wonderful thing I should ha' thought o' her, warn't it, Miss? She bein' jest the woman for me."

And Sandy wagged his tail.

There is joy in me thus to write of happy things. Our lives depend not on the abundance of things we possess, but on our tempers, and who could be anything but sunny tempered when all smile on her as they do on Joan Cantley at this time?

To-day, I came by way of the blacksmith's shop. William was about to shoe a sturdy cob, and I watched the operation from beginning to end. I loved the sight, its picturesqueness, its quiet, methodical decision and exactitude, its poetry. There were moments, too, when I saw strong, virile pictures, with glorious

lights and shades. And there were elements no picture could contain—the clang of the hammer on the red hot shoe held on the anvil, its fitting to the hoof, the turn of the head as the cob showed his interest in the proceedings, the smell of the place, the measured movements of the man, the living fire, the sentient spirit of the place.

It is an enchanting thing to see life as a picture, better than to have a picture recall life.

Then a man brought up a donkey to be shod.

William turned to me with a laugh.

"I can tell you, Miss, I would far rather clap four shoes on to a colt, for the first time of shoeing, than I would shoe a donkey. Aye, that I would, any day!"

"Yer allus ses that when I brings my dickey to see yer!" the owner of the donkey remarked.

"We all has our antipathies, George, and donkeys be mine!" William remarked.

And one day during the week, old Mrs. Wartley and her son drove many miles to the funeral of a distant cousin. Of more interest than the paying of their last respects to the dead was the expectation of meeting many scattered members of the family.

These expectations were fulfilled, and the humorous smile I love to see played around Mrs. Wartley's lips as she told of her day's experience.

"My dear, there were folks there I have not seen for years. Henry Wartley came from Somerset, and Charles from Kent. And some have gone up

in the world, and some have gone down, and the curiosity some of them had for the affairs of the others made me smile. And you see, dear child, they were all very attentive to me and John, for they had all heard of my brother's money."

She smiled again at the recollections.

"It scarcely matters what is the occasion, but it has its comic side, and it isn't often I fail to see it," she observed.

You will smile when you read what has been my especial study this week. This—just the particular movements by which cows, and sheep, and horses lie down. I put it to you. Could you tell, if your life depended on it, exactly how a rest-seeking sheep sinks to earth? I love to attain to knowledge such as this. It is all in the great drama of things. And before this, the springtime lambs have grown independent of their mothers, and are separated from them; not so the gay young foals.

The cuckoo has gone away. Little fly-catchers every day enchant me with their fly-catching, and consequential wag-tails are making a second nest in an old ash tree near by. What wonderful things are swallows' shadows when the birds flit all ways low to the ground, as to-day they do!

LIV.

August, 9th.

HARVEST begins to-day. I have waited expectantly and ardently for this event of my green year. Nature's order, supreme, mysterious, magical, stirs me to quivering wonder. I learn from John Wartley that nature gives the grain about forty days from the forming of the ear to the ripening to harvest in normal seasons. I have watched green fields change slowly to gold—level surfaces, sometimes washed in sun gold, sometimes with cloud shadows shifting over them. The very hedges become dwarfed by the height of full grown corn. "Nothing higher than the wheat ears!" I tell myself, as I look across the level stretches. The generosity and lavishness of it all fill me with a sense of childish irresponsibility. For the first time in my life I shall realize the true feeling of thanksgiving for the harvest safely carried, when the time comes.

The brightest wild flowers—poppies, blue succory, yellow corn marigolds—grow amid the ripe corn—a lovely colour scheme of a Master mind. The smell of corn fields, a mingling of earth smell with the smell of

flower and grain and straw is elusive. It comes with the wind music on the hollow stalks. The amazing fact is borne in upon me that the goodness has left the hollow corn stems, and hanging leaf blade ; all that the plant had to give is now stored in the kernels within the ear.

And all day I have heard this sound of reapers. There is intense picturesqueness where three horses work abreast, and a magnificent sense of dignity. One reaper followed the other, so that the space between them rarely varied. The bound sheaves fell from them, and ever the circle they made grew smaller. At last but a slip remained in the middle of the field —that, too, fell. There is a gay spirit abroad in harvest time. Each man earns seven pounds ten shillings—a heartening sum to make. They do not go home to dinner, and there is excuse for additional meals—elevens and fours, as well as dinner, and these meals are merry picnics. The men choose for themselves one of their fellows, and he has the grand old title—Lord of the Harvest.

Barbara writes to ask me to join her husband and herself on a remote Yorkshire moor, by the twelfth. She thinks I should enjoy the surroundings. I have refused ; the truth is, I do not wish to lose my time here, with its soul-discipline and fair, beautiful revelations. I realize a quiet resignation in heath and moor, but an active buoyancy in this cultivated farm land. I desire this buoyant happiness rather than pensiveness. Vague sensing of things like this I

could never put into words to Barbara. There is so much of me I can never disclose to her, that remains under lock and key when I approach her.

A curious thing has happened. After I had written this of myself and Barbara, Sonny put his head in at the door, with tear-stained face and bleeding finger. His mother had gone to Carminster, and he brought his woe to me. With the woe was a great slice of pride at having suffered an honourable hurt. I ministered to the pride as much as to the wound. I loved it so. Afterwards, we went out to make daisy chains, when a motor glided up to the door. In it sat Barbara and her husband. They were on their way north, and as I was not greatly off the track, purposed this surprise visit to me. Colonel Bailey went off for a farm walk with John Wartley, and Barbara and I sat under the beeches. She had much to say, and suddenly she remarked:

"I wish I had had a mother like yours, Joan!"

There could scarcely have been sharper contrasts between mothers, as you know. Ours was all that was womanly and sensitive and devoted, hers, of the world, worldly, neither faithful wife nor dutiful mother. Then, she told me, a little child is coming. I had never seen Barbara frank, and tender, and open before. I had never seen her face soften. Whatever was unbalanced in her before has righted itself. It will come, that which I have craved for Barbara, a wider range of emotions. Her nature has been starved and cramped—but motherhood will give her

what she needs. I read already yearnings for bigger things than heretofore have satisfied her.

And there is something she would like me to tell you. It took a long while to tell, but she seemed to have made up her mind that you and I should know. This afternoon has discovered to me all that has made Barbara bewildering and perplexing. As far as I can, you shall have her own words.

She said:

"As a little child of eleven or twelve I realized my mother was contemptible. I accepted the fact calmly and indifferently, as a young stoic might have done. I found the strangest and most complete comfort in a couple of lines of the school-room poem—The Miller of the Dee—lines that ran:

> "I care for nobody, no not I,
> And nobody cares for me."

The words were like a lay text. I hugged them to me with an abandonment I wonder at in these days. I repeated them at all hours. They reconciled me to everything. Soon I could say them as gospel truth —for me they were true. It was terrible for a child of eleven to have arrived at that," she added gravely.

"There was your father!" I reminded her.

"My father!" she shuddered. "About that time he became paralyzed. His mouth was drawn on one side. I hated to look at him. If I had ever felt affection for him, I lost it then."

I muttered something as to the sadness of it all.

"It did not end at that!"

Sonny emptied two handfuls of daisies into her lap, and ran away again. She picked the flowers one by one into a bunch, and presently tucked them into her belt.

"It did not end at that," she repeated. "I must have been a strange child. I might have been fifteen when I read the story of *Undine*. It seized hold of more than my fancy. It took possession of me heart and soul—a woman without a soul. I remember now how I stood in horrible wonder. Then I told myself—'I have no soul.' I cherished the thought, nourished it, and in the end I almost believed it.

"No one knew. I never meant anyone to know. But the years that ought to have been happy, careless years became a period for reckless hardening of my nature. I still told myself—'I have no soul.' It was the foundation on which I built. Even when I had grown up and left school, I had not put the idea from me as childish folly. I had not cast it forth when Keith fell in love with me. A society fortune-teller, who examined my hand, showed me how for years I had repressed my natural affection. I knew it was true. He looked keenly at me and declared:

"'A good man loves you, but he gives all and gets little in return. You will realize this, and you will refuse to marry him!'

"Repression had been my practice too long for love to struggle to a birth. I knew it, and I acted on the man's words, not lightly, but after a long

struggle, and more for the man who loved me than for my own sake."

She laid her hand over mine.

"I do not think you dreamed I had a story such as that to tell, Joan!" she said very sadly.

It was about the last thing I could have dreamed.

"As I look back to the strange influence of two lines of childish poetry, a fairy story, and the divination of a man who read the lines of men's hands, they seem strange, uncanny things so to have made a woman's life. Is it hard to believe my words?"

"They explain many things that bewildered me," I told her.

"I have won through now—such things could not rule a whole life—and I rejoice that Keith has gained the love of a good woman. Such men deserve a woman's truest devotion—or nothing at all from her."

I longed for her to go on talking, revealing hidden depths, disclosing pages of a soul's warring to come to its own.

"It seems to me," she said thoughtfully, "those unwholesome surroundings and influences of my childhood, with the indifference they engendered, killed any artistic instinct within me, and made me a materialist. Lately, I feel as if dormant feelings, appreciations, yearnings are awakening in me. I have been locked in a prison house; now the door is thrown open, and I can see beyond. One day, I shall go farther, and leave the prison behind me—if

I have not already. A little life will want guidance, Joan."

I felt that a great happiness and freedom possessed her soul. She had found herself—no wonder she was happy and triumphant.

"I owe it to your faithful friendship to tell you all this, and," she hesitated ever so slightly, "I want you, some day, to tell Keith what I have told you. As it is, he must judge me harshly. I want his kinder judgment."

You see, dear shipmate, you and I have never known Barbara ; we knew only something that passed for her, that could never quite have deceived herself, I venture to think, but deceived others.

She confessed that she has a true and kindly affection for her husband, but it seems to me the wealth of all that lies deepest in her is being held in reserve for the little life that is to be.

And just then Granny Wartley came towards us with Adelaide—of suffragette propensities—following hard on with tea. John Wartley and Colonel Bailey joined us. In these days, with the blessed assurance that he has money enough for all the emergencies of his farm, enough to farm it as it ought to be farmed, John Wartley's very soul seems to have widened, and grown warmer, and more serene. And after tea our visitors left. We gave them a hearty send-off, and Sonny made a sweet childish offering of a little sheaf of wheat ears Albert had cunningly cut and tied for him—notice Sonny's proclivity for

giving prized sixpences, cherished models of wheat sheaves and other things. Barbara put her arms round him, and kissed him. Alec approaches the time when kissing is regarded as an indignity. I felt myself saturated in rejoicing over my new Barbara. Some of the most beautiful things of my life have come to me at Pelton.

My knowledge of human nature does not make it clear to me if obsessions such as Barbara's are common. It is as if some evil spirit has been exorcised. If it be in the manner of a miracle, then I bow my head with thanksgiving. I used to fear for Barbara, even the wear and tear of everyday life—now I fear no longer.

Since she left I have been singing out of sheer exuberance of heart. I have run races with Alec and Sonny, and finally I sat down to this letter while the news would come freshly and spontaneously from my pen.

I wish Barbara and May Wartley had met, but the latter only returned home when Barbara had departed half an hour or more. It was the fates' decree.

I am so happy, Keith.

"No house of stone
Was built for me
When the sun shines
I am a bee."

LV.

August, 17th.

SERENE, satisfied, gratified ; these words describe my state of mind. I have news this week, after preaching patience to my soul, that my book is accepted. The knowledge that it is accepted on its own merits means much to me. It has stood the test I desired for it, and the publisher has had the grace to indite me a charming letter. I wonder, does he guess the gratitude that letter invokes? If so, it was worth the writing, even from his point of view. I have told Felix the whole truth (he was down for a couple of days), and received his forgiveness. I think he appreciates and approves this independent step on my part. There was a world of mischief in his eyes as he asked me:

"Joan, shall you practice independence of this rank order through life? I had better know."

But now that my work has been fairly tested, I am content to look upon the firm of Harridon and Blake as my future publishers. Of this I hastened to assure him, but I let him understand, that had the book been returned, I should have considered it condemned—

unable to pass muster—and I should never have written another word. I think, perhaps, only *you* could understand the bitter pain and trouble it would have been to me to lay down my pen. After Felix, it is the love of my life.

Already, a fair quantity of the corn has fallen. The barley is badly 'laid' by reason of some heavy storms we have had, and must, therefore, be cut with the scythe. This reaping of barley is often kept for the *early* morning, while yet the dew is too heavy to do anything with corn already cut.

How tensely this fact reminds one of the lines:

> "Only reapers reaping *early*,
> In among the bearded barley."

I ask myself if Tennyson were countryman enough to know the true touch he gave there. I like to think he was.

To-day, they are carting corn, and as I sit in the garden writing, I hear, from time to time, the clear, treble voices of small boys as they shout: "*Hold* yer! *Hold* yer!" These boys lead the horses, and as the waggons move forward that shout of "*Hold* yer! *Hold* yer!" warns the men on the loads to balance themselves. It is the school boys' one chance in the year to attain to the dignity of field work. They are proud 'to do' a harvest, and to "haller *Hold* yer!"

I can feel the gladness of the harvest through all my being. I share it with those about me. No one is indifferent to it here at Pelton. Even an old bed-

ridden cottage woman, nearing eighty, knows just how far the harvest operations have proceeded here, on the Manor Farm, and on all the other farms in the parish. She recalls harvest reminiscences ; I expect she recalls them each season as the time comes round. The year is crowned, and there is a sense of something penetrating and generous, which affects the human soul as cannot seed time, nor time of growing, but only the harvest of the grain.

I have spent much of my day with Granny Wartley. She is agitated, distressed, and unnerved. She will not tell her son, nor May, yet she must tell someone of the experience of the night. She has told it to me.

She went to bed last night well and happy. She had been asleep some little time, when she was suddenly awakened.

"There passed through the room," she says awe-stricken, "the noise of wings. I knew it was not of earth—it was more terrible than anything I have ever heard or seen—I was horror-stricken. It was no nightmare. I heard it after I was awake, and there came with it a deadly feeling of evil such as I cannot put into words. It came, it went, and the grandfather's clock in the hall struck midnight. It is a warning!" she whispered, her poor face working, "and I have five children scattered the world over, and John here. I have had other warnings in my life as solemn as this, but I have never known the terror of last night. I think," she said brokenly, "I shall

hear of a death before many days are over"; a shuddering sigh broke from her.

I tried to lead her mind from these painful topics. She told me also of the following experience she had had.

"Once," she said, "I did a foolish thing. My children were all young, and I went into a cottage to see a sick child, without asking what she ailed. While there, I heard the doctor had just declared the disease to be scarlet fever. I went out quickly. I thought what a terrible thing it would be if I caught it and gave it to my little ones. I worked myself into a fever of anxiety, and laid awake all the night. In the morning I was assured the fever would show itself in me, in its due course. I thought I would go down and consult the doctor, and ask his advice. I stood by the window in my bedroom, a miserable woman. I wondered if I should pray to God about it. As I stood there, it was as if someone laid a hand on my shoulder, and said to me, with assurance and authority:

"'You have *not* caught this fever!'

"I never doubted the truth of these words that were spoken silently into my heart. I went up to my children, and took my baby into my arms. I had no fear any longer. It was divine assurance, my child, and I knew it."

I coaxed from her yet another 'experience.'

"In my young days," she said softly, "my love and faith in God were not what they are now. That

which troubled me sorely were the words concerning the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation—a matter, we will say, of the sins of a man's great-grandfather hurting and troubling *him*. I could not associate a gracious, pitiful, nor merciful God with such doings. I often worried over the matter, and let it lodge in my mind to the exclusion of more worthy thoughts. In the darkness of night, as I lay awake, a voice spoke silently into my heart. 'God is not what you fear He is!' Just that, no more, but think, my child, what these words swept away."

Her face shone.

From the lips of this gentle soul, these latter experiences I have told you, wholly beautiful as they are, struck no strange note. They seemed natural and fitting. But this of last night—it makes me apprehensive and perplexed. Will evil tidings reach the Manor Farm, where all is happy, all is tranquil?

"I must bide patiently!" she murmurs quietly, harking back to the terror of the night.

And thus we leave it—and wait. And no one knows but ourselves that we wait—nor know we what we await.

On Sunday, and on the following Sundays, will be published the banns of marriage between Felix Harridon and Joan Althea Cantley. It is all as I could wish, and a great quietness possesses my soul. When a human being is in harmony with its surroundings, and gathers from them the essence of its moods, that

is to know the throbbing pulse of life. I have experienced the nausea of a more artificial life, where men and women work hard at pleasure without enjoying life, where they have a surfeit of excitement, yet crave for more. Where they do things because others do them, whether there be joy in them or not, so far as they are concerned. It was easier for Stevenson to be philosophical and gay in his Samoa than it would have been if those days had been passed in Edinburgh, or London. I am bound to confess though, that this spirit of place is only strongly developed in some natures. Aunt Mary can take her drowsy drive as well in the Park as in a country lane. It matters not to her that the rumble of wheels is in her ears, while all her mind is given to her games of patience. The very quietude of the country oppresses those of the town. I like to feel how silent sentient things can be.

LVI.

August, 24th.

I HAD it in my heart to write you a happy, gaiety-woven letter this mail. All my little world was smiling graciously upon me, and Felix, while he was down, was infectiously gay.

Now, all is sadness, of which I can hardly write with steady pen. Yesterday, as I rode up a sunlit lane, I saw Bob Ingleby on the field side of the hedge. It was late in the afternoon, and I had passed glad-faced harvesters with horses and waggons—the field had been carted, the stack was finished, lacking only its trimming and thatching. Bob Ingleby and his horse had stayed behind alone. He sat the lithe, long-limbed animal, just gazing over the gathered stubble. A lark was singing gloriously overhead. I caught his face before he looked and saw me. I cannot tell you the sadness of it.

With his riding crop he pointed over the freshly cleared acres.

"The last harvest this land will ever yield me. It is one of the fields I give up in a few weeks' time. Hard lines, isn't it, Joan? It's good, clean land,

and I have farmed it well, and my fathers before me."

I had guessed that it was this which weighed upon him, and I had pleasure in giving my opinion on those responsible for the state of affairs.

"We have never grown rich over farming, only made a fair living, and now they take that chance from me. I daresay you know that it was an uncle of mine who paid for my time at Winchester. My father could never have run to it."

He bit back a sigh.

"We farmers are a complaining lot. Nothing is ever right with us!"

He tried, as he has tried from the first, to make light of his trouble. Ah, but I never realized until I saw him looking over that cleared field, and those adjoining it, how deep this trouble goes with him.

This is not all, Keith. Later in the day, a young farm horse took fright, and in stopping it, for it had broken loose from the lad who was working it, Bob was grievously injured. The men took a gate off its hinges and carried him home.

Basil Cameron has been with him all night. A specialist is expected every moment. He is motoring down from London. I am writing this at the Abbey Farm, because Margaret will have me with her while the specialist and Basil are upstairs with Bob.

I saw *him* this morning. He knew me. He smiled.

I cannot write any more, at any rate until the

specialist has come and gone. It may be post time before then, so this may be all I can tell you.

My whole being cries out: "Why—why—why comes more trouble to one already weighted with its burden?"

Margaret does not weep, only she is pale as death. We wait—wait the issues of life and death.

"And this," says Granny Wartley, "is the meaning of that 'warning' of one little week ago."

Between Bob and Mrs. Wartley there exists a warm affection. He is little less to her than her own children and she has known him all his life. He is the age, almost to a day, of one of her boys. I told you of her ready sympathy and friendship for Felix. For Bob, her love and sympathy is of the deep undercurrent that is ever flowing between souls in a community, that you fathom from time to time, and often unexpectedly.

She is in heavy sorrow over this—it is the more poignant because of that midnight 'warning.' That quick instinct of hers makes her curiously familiar with the natures of those she loves. It gives her an instinctive knowledge of the depths in them. Yet her quiet, her submission, her calmness teach us courage. She is a beneficent force among us all.

I close this—the specialist is upstairs.

LVII.

August, 30th.

We are comforted—a little. The rust of anxiety is stayed. Bob Ingleby will live. Beyond that, we hardly go at present; the fact is the burden of our thoughts and words. We have passed through hushed, terrible hours since I posted my last mail letter to you, while life and death were at fierce odds. I realized with curious poignancy that the one really masterly personality, the strongest, most strenuous life in the parish, was in grave jeopardy. Keith, Bob Ingleby is very strong, very valiant in comparison with those about him—yes, even when I place him beside Basil Cameron—and Felix.

It is only the few in this world who can claim the strength and courage of his stedfast soul. These qualities would seem to be his birthright, and the stern condition goes with them—that as a man's strength so is his burden. My God! how fine he was lying there facing death—and smiling!

As I pass daily between the Manor Farm and the Abbey House, the villagers stop to ask how it goes with him. And the day following the accident there

came through the village a stranger, who, once in his tramping, vagabond life, received some signal kindness from Bob Ingleby. He heard the news of the accident, and came to make enquiry. Margaret asked me to speak to him, and hours afterwards I found him by the roadside, with bowed head, and his face buried in his hands. I had told him a great London doctor was on his way.

"I see him come, and I see him go!" he muttered, "but I feared to ask him for the truth."

"If he lives this night through, the doctor hopes for life and not death," I said.

He uncovered his face.

"Thank yer, lady, for tellin' me. *If* he lives the night through!" he repeated.

And he stayed there, by the roadside, until morning.

Since then, he has come each day, no one knows from whence, to beg for the latest news. I ventured to ask him, one day, how Bob had befriended him. He looked at me a moment, distrustfully, then he said:

"He found me in sore straits, Miss; 'twas delirium tremens, and he wouldn't leave me the whole o' a blessed night. The doctor had been called out and he jest did the best he could for me. I never had a friend i' the world till I had him, and he's the best friend a man could have—Lord bless him. Most for his sake, and because I had dreamed the *drunkard's* dream, I ha' gev up the drink."

And the man told me that every year he comes to

Pelton to report himself to Bob. That was his mission last week.

"He'd give me regular work, lady, and I should dearly like to labour on the land, but my wife 'ont lave the town—town bred she be," he muttered scornfully.

Yesterday, he returned to his home—it meant a tramp of over thirty miles—and he has left me his name and address and I am to write to him, after a few days, to tell him how Bob goes towards convalescence.

The thing that we keep in some dark background of our brains is the question—how far will Bob Ingleby ever return to his old splendid health and strength—but I gave no hint of our fears to this humble wayfarer.

I ask myself why the lives of these two men have crossed in the direst moments of each existence? The one might have died if Bob had not ministered to him, body and soul, and dragged him up from degradation, and worse than death. And now by reason of Bob's own danger, new emotions have been stirred in this man—surely, for some purpose. The life of a man reaches far. Some sequence of thought, I fail to trace back, brings to my mind the healing of the man, blind from his birth. "Did this man sin, or his parents? Neither did this man sin, nor his parents, but that the works of God be made manifest," and that last, it seems to me, may take many forms, must take them. Destiny—what is it? Providence —what is it? How we poor fools grope in the dark!

I cannot tell you the half of what I hear, for this accident has loosened men's (and more especially women's) tongues, and they speak of many good deeds, many kindly deeds, that Bob Ingleby has performed. I see now, as I never saw before, what the personality of Bob Ingleby stands for in this quiet little country village. To have one's friends praised and appreciated and beloved in this manner is like tasting a sort of spiritual honey.

And now, to turn for a moment to a personal matter. Felix and I hope to be married on the eighteenth day of September. I want the sun to shine upon me at the wedding hour. I want your blessing to come speeding in some silent form from your far India. Felix has grown inexpressibly dear to me these days. He does not misunderstand nor misjudge my friendship for Bob Ingleby.

LVIII.

September, 6th.

Our hearts are many degrees lighter than they were last week, because Bob Ingleby stands farther than he did from the great beyond. Slowly and surely he returns to us—the daylight is once more allowed into his room. It counts for much. Light and hope go hand in hand, I think.

These September days are gorgeous, glorious days, ripe, luscious, mellow days. It hurts me to have Bob miss the joy of them, yet it is a minor regret in our thanksgiving hearts. We hope, and Basil Cameron does not kill our hope. He gives it to us. Will the old health and strength be renewed?—we ask. And to that he dares only say at present—perhaps.

Those who know and love them well, know that when a sufficient time since Hugh Derston's death shall have elapsed, Margaret will marry Basil Cameron. I long to see a bright, settled future for Bob. It will be a grievous thing to lose Margaret. God grant he may have his old vigour and strength again, and be happy. I whisper those words to myself many times. It is all I can do.

Basil Cameron realizes his happiness so supremely, that to us who watch, it is like feeling (it is far too quiet and unobtrusive to say, seeing), a beautiful dramatic scene with happiness personified. Intense happiness, I believe, ennobles and sweetens human nature. If there were more happy people in the world, there would be less sin and blatant meanness.

Margaret speaks to me of her happiness.

"When, what for a long time has been—*the might have been*—changes, and becomes the fact that lives, and is, and there is no need any longer for resignation, and meekness, and patience, and the strength to make the best of things, there is only happiness in its most beautiful garb, Joan."

Margaret and joy blend with such exquisite harmony. I had come upon her with tears in her eyes. But they were tears of happiness.

"To have, and be filled with only happiness is a little too much for me!" she said, in excuse for them.

Yet below and behind the happiness is something that weighs heavily. It weighs on Margaret and it weighs on me—our anxiety for Bob.

This trouble is something that rises up even when we are happiest. It comes like something vague, and disquieting, and gradually we realize what it is. I have brought pain to Bob, and Margaret is going forth one day, as if there were no Bob to keep house for. And we are grieved and remorseful when we remember. It is a penalty human beings have to pay for having hearts.

We all of us sense things like these, but some of us never speak of them, and some of us dare not. They belong to life, they make for the pain of life—and for sighs.

In less than two weeks, Pelton days will have glided silently and quietly into the past. And I, from venturing life's adventure alone, go forward with another to share it, and one who cares greatly to make it a happy one.

When one stands at the parting of the ways, one has need of a bridle for one's tongue. Wherever I look, I see only the kindly thought of others for me. It grips my heart. I cannot trust myself to say what I would.

I have a letter from Paul which brought the tears into my eyes. To love is sometimes to make a man noble and very generous in spirit. I have had beautiful jewels from Lady Jane, with the caustic remark: "I know you have no passion for jewels, but at least they have as much heart as flowers, and they are worth more."

I wonder who dares say they are worth more, except from a mere money point of view. If we had to make our choice between a world without jewels or a world without flowers, should we choose the jewels, think you?

Paul's present was a crystal globe—just that, but the words that came with it make it a precious thing to me for ever. I do not quote them—they were meant only for my eyes.

I must get away from things that are stirring me to the depths—the blue and purple and scarlet things, with all the subtlety these words have for me.

I ought to be half dead, and wholly morbid, and nerve-racked with the fatigue of dressmaker's fittings, and a thousand and one other intricacies pertaining to garments.

I have been to London twice, each time staying *one* night. Lady Jane almost flouts me in her despair of me. I shrug my shoulders.

These visits, I confess, were a concession, or rather a necessity, but I have not further infringed on my golden hours. If I had been away, I should not have played my poor little part in a strange—I know not whether to write—comedy or tragedy.

A week ago, a dirty envelope with an almost illegible address came to me. The letter inside was no better. It was from Clara Priestly. She wrote from the hop-picking district, and the letter breathed an angry despair. Her scissor-grinder has deserted her for a younger woman, and a more experienced picker —one who can earn more. She writes she is sick of the life, and the hop-pickers. She has not been brought up to such ways as theirs—an echo, you perceive, of that old pride of respectability. She is sorry she ever left her husband. She yearns for her children. Would I see Tom and plead with him to take her back? I, Keith. I, of all people, for she knew how signally I had failed when I had sought to lessen her anger against her husband. I know not

what line of reasoning caused her choice to fall on me as mediator. I accepted my task, and I went forth to find the deserted husband.

He was cleaning his gun, with little Tom absorbingly interested beside him. Another child was sobbing with earache on an old sofa.

I knew no better way than to put his wife's letter into his hands. He is not much of a scholar, and it ended in my reading it to him.

He seized the essential fact and he put it alongside his own neglected and miserable existence. He pointed to the pain-racked child.

"I'll hev her back, Miss. The little 'uns wants her bad enow, the Lord knows—and so du I."

He looked at me shamefacedly.

"We shall git on better, mayhaps, arter this. All the forgivin' won't be on her side now!"

It certainly would not. And there flooded into my memory some lines that I read, I know not when nor where. They have for title—"The Balance."

> "Must I endure with nothing to forgive,
> Who did a shade wrong thee?
> Oh love! an instant less than perfect live,
> A little injure me."

How pathetically human the cry of those words, though it may be a note not often struck.

The result of my interview was to summon Clara Priestly home, and Tom wrote on his own account.

She has come. Her husband met her at the station, and the next day I saw her.

She is superbly repentant.

She is a large, handsome woman—a virago filled with self-abasement and self-reproach.

I wonder, almost, her shame did not keep her away, but there was mother-love warring with it. Now that she sees the past with opened eyes, she is heartbroken to have foregone her respectability. She is almost too ashamed to look her neighbours in the face.

"If I hadn't ha' come home to Tom, I should ha' hanged myself!" she confided to me.

Then she fell on her knees and clasped my hand and kissed it.

"Had yer to plead very hard for me, Miss?"

"You had done a very grievous thing!" I was not going to tell her there had been no special pleading—and I added: "You must not forget that your husband was not bound to take you back."

After that I did my best to hearten her. Isn't it Shakespeare himself who, in more parliamentary language than I can recall, says: "Don't kick a man when he is down!" And, poor soul, her shame has humbled her to the dust.

Laura and her husband come over for my wedding. They will stay with the Reids. Laura is by way of being sarcastic. She herself enjoyed being married in the presence of hundreds of eyes. She cannot understand that I do not hanker after spectators. The worthy James will give me over to Felix' keeping, and I shall try my best for the one moment to imagine you are beside me.

I can never tell you how good the Reids are to me. I try to believe it is for Felix' sake. Sybil rejoices over us both—there seems to be something beneficent in her tenderness towards us, something pale, golden, quiet, and soft, like music in a church.

She rests me. Sir Samuel is like a bulwark.

LIX.

September, 12th.

Wonder and glamour and spiritual beauty have been about my year—it has not lacked romance, and by the simple, quiet way of it, there has come to me a curious sense of the mediaeval that enchants me. This year of mine does not link into the chain of the other years. It is of a larger link and of more precious material.

If we would be wise, we must let the simple things of life teach us the great lessons. I honestly believe there is more in me for Felix to love by reason of my Pelton days.

To-day, I had a talk with an old road mender. He is no longer on the active list, having a stiff leg, and younger men are now generally employed, and the old man is somewhat scornful and contemptuous in consequence.

"If I hear aright, the roads cost the country a mint o' money—thousands o' pounds more than they did ought. Sakes alive, there be men for County Council roads, and there be men for District Council roads, and ter happen that one will hev to walk miles

over t'others roads to git to his own. There ain't no sense in it to my thinkin'."

The old man smiled sarcastically, and looked knowing.

"Yer would ha' thought thim as has heads might ha' put 'em together and devised better than that, wouldn't yer, Miss? Might ha' 'malgamated somehow, and let the men do the work that lie nighest to 'em."

I suggested it was difficult to teach people common sense.

"Tach 'em common sense! aye, that ter be,—yer are right there, Miss, and no mistake. And the men 'emselves don't take the pride i' their work that I took. I allus worked to ease the hills. Sir Samuel stopped me one day, and he says to me—'George,' he says, 'Swelters Hill ain't so steep as it was when I was a boy!'

"'No, nor t'ain't, Sir. I allus got the easin o' hills in my mind, and I mends wie that thought i' my head. I ha' eased the gradient o' many hills in my time,' I tells him. He give me half-a-crown, Miss, and what yer might call a piece o' encouragement, his noticin' on it. Lawk a mercy them as du the work now don't trouble their heads 'bout nought save leavin'-off time. What does they care for the easin' o' the hills?" he asked with fine scorn. He nodded his head sapiently.

"They did a bad day's work when they decided old men was not good enough to mend roads."

And there we had reached the root of the grievance, poor old fellow.

"Many a hape o' flints I ha' broke for the roads, afore this here granite come into fashin. Good for motors ter may be, but cruel for horses—hard as iron ; jars 'em, it do, and wears 'em out, and slippery as the devil come a frost. And they talks o' the world goin' forrad, they du. You may believe me, Miss, t'ain't all forrads what looks forrads ; to my mind some on't is back'ards."

One bit of Pelton goes with me into my new life. I have bought the Great Auk. The dear old ruffian has grown into my heart. The kinship between man and his beast can be a precious thing to those who will make it so. There is something wild and deep and joyous in it. We have lost the old poetic mediaeval way of holding the beasts. I love to think of the qualities and powers St. Francis and St. Anthony endued them with in their own minds to feel it worth while to preach to them. We do not give the animals what the middle ages gave them.

"Brother wolf, I bid thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, come now with me, nothing doubting, and let us go 'stablish this peace in God's name."

Such language would be held profane, the language of a lunatic in these days ; but, Keith, I feel sure we have gone too far the other way. Civilization has killed much in us. Out of the past, out of the depths in us, out of the wrack of what is lost, something echoes still in us as the beast we love turns to gaze at

us. The Great Auk is not beautiful, but he is my friend. I enjoy his friendship. When I come to die I shall have to put down a portion of my happiness and pleasure to him.

I keep Felix' name rather out of my letters, because if I let myself go I should rhapsodize. But nine-tenths of my thoughts are of him.

LX.

Sea View,
Helston, September 18th.

Joan Harridon greets you, *mon chèr*. And I do not know that her soul was ever quite so tender towards you as to-day it is.

You see, I am in melting mood. On one side I have my beloved Felix, on the other my green year is over. I have bidden it a sorrowful farewell, and to all the dear folks who have gone to its making.

The little church was sweet and sunlit this afternoon when, with reverence and humility, Felix and I stood before God and were made man and wife. There is some beautiful phrasing in the marriage service. I am what I am, but I trust I have it in me to make Felix a dutiful and loving wife.

I had a charming wedding dress, because I thought it my woman's right, and vanity. The villagers packed the little village church tight to see me married, who have only known them this one green year.

My heart was full—over full.

I just stopped to shake the hand of the dear old Corporal.

"God bless yer," he muttered. Then he took Felix' hand in both of his and cried: "If you don't love and cherish her like the light of your eye yer ought tu, Sir."

And Felix wrung the old man's hands and answered, "She *is* the light of my eyes."

And now Felix and I have come away, not very far. We have motored over to the dear sea place where we spent a memorable June day, to spend here a portion of our honeymoon. It is the *Harvest* Moon we shall watch rise out of the sea; it is rising now.

I made Felix write his choice of place on a slip of paper. I did the same. I held them, and Felix drew. When the childish trick was done we discovered both had written Helston. What could we do but come?

I told you once that my friendships were the pillars of my life. It is immensely true of the dear Pelton folks.

I went this morning to bid Bob Ingleby good-bye.

"I knew you would come," he said. He smiled, and made merry.

But, Keith, behind it all, we both knew he was brave and gay for my sake. When he was delirious it was my name that was ever on his lips. Those strong brown hands of his are white and thin now. Still, he is pitifully weak, but the brave inner spirit of the man is strong as ever.

I have wondered if Bob Ingleby has wished I had not recrossed his path. He set my fears at rest.

"You have called this year of yours your golden

year, Joan. It has been a golden year for me, too."

And thus I knew. He is glad I came to Pelton, in spite of the pain I have given him.

The early evening closes in upon us, a quiet tide reaches forward. The voice of the sea is the touch of mystery here ; it penetrates my soul.

In a few minutes we shall walk—Felix and I—to the village post office to send you this—this love-letter from my heart.

Dare I say I have felt your spirit close to me to-day? I think so.

Felix calls me. I shall lose the post if I do not hasten.

Many have uttered the dear words, "God bless you," over me to-day—the dear old Granny Wartley, and Margaret Derston, the ancient Corporal, Martha Heskins, and Bog Ingleby.

Good Night, my friend
Good-Bye, my friend.

GLASGOW: PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.

A Selection from Macmillan's List of Autumn Books 1913

A CHANGED MAN, THE WAITING SUPPER, AND OTHER TALES, CONCLUDING WITH THE ROMANTIC ADVENTURES OF A MILKMAID.

By THOMAS HARDY. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS. A NOVEL.

By H. G. WELLS. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

Athenaeum.—"The character of Mary is the finest and most complex that Mr. Wells has ever created. . . As we lay down the book our thoughts turn once more to the sweet and noble figure of his heroine, unconscious martyr to a cause which has yet to come to the front of life before complete civilisation is reached—the making possible of friendship between man and woman—'l'amitié impossible.'"

Sunday Times.—"Mr. Wells's love scenes are worthy of the novelist at his best. . . . Mary, with her self-reliant brain, her passionate heart, her cult of freedom, is as convincing as she is charming."

Daily Telegraph.—"Lady Mary is interestingly modern, and yet warmly sympathetic."

NEW FICTION

BENDISH: A Study in Prodigality.

By MAURICE HEWLETT. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

Daily Chronicle.—"This novel is one of Mr. Hewlett's finest. Whether one looks at its deft hammer-strokes of characterisation, at the tender truth of its pictures of love and friendship, at its mastery of English thought, or its restrained eloquence, the result is the same: one must confess that English fiction is as great now as ever it was. One swells with pride to think that modern men can write so well."

Morning Post.—"The novel is full of fascination and interest."

World.—Considered as a work of deliberate, delicate, highly finished art, Mr. Maurice Hewlett has probably done nothing better than this his latest book."

HERE ARE LADIES.

By JAMES STEPHENS, Author of "The Crock of Gold." Crown 8vo. 5*s*. net.

A series of short character sketches occupy the main part of the volume. Some of them consist of no more than a single conversation, or single incident; others may be called stories, and record the events of months or years; but all are marked by skilful characterisation, and abound in rich Irish humour. These sketches are followed by a section in which the reader is given the opinions and reflections of a certain old gentleman on such subjects as Matrimony, Dancing, Tobacco, Methods of Education, etc. The original and amusing manner in which these various subjects are discussed is very entertaining, and recalls the delight experienced by the reader of the Philosopher's eloquent speeches in *The Crock of Gold*.

BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE SCHOOLROOM. Being the Experiences of a Young Governess.

By FLORENCE MONTGOMERY, Author of "Misunderstood." Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

NEW FICTION

THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY.

By EDITH WHARTON. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

THE INSIDE OF THE CUP.

By WINSTON CHURCHILL. With Illustrations. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

Daily Chronicle.—"Ordinary criticism, the remark that this is a clever book, an absorbing story, does not seem appropriate to describe Mr. Churchill's latest. The story is too unusual for such trite phrasing, and one calculated to arouse much thought and great argument among those who read it. . . . One's feeling about the whole story is that it is in some way magnificent, with many a fine and noble personality coming into it, both men and women."

Times.—"Mr. Churchill has written a fine and moving book."

Truth.—"This brilliant novel. . . . In a word, *The Inside of the Cup* is a sign of the times, and a book for the times which everyone should read."

VAN CLEVE.

By MARY S. WATTS, Author of "Nathan Burke," etc. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

Mrs. Watts's new book is a story of modern life, a fact that will commend it to those who will be eager to see if her pen is as facile in this field as it was in that of historical fiction. The story opens about the year 1892 and comes up to the present date.

MY GREEN YEAR: Letters from the Manor Farm.

By E. L. DOON. Extra crown 8vo. 6*s*.

A book of the same type as *The Odd Farmhouse*, which recently attracted some attention. Told in the form of letters written by a girl to her twin brother in India, the story has much human nature in it, and a delightful feeling for country life and character.

TRAVEL & SPORT

MY LIFE AMONG THE ESKIMOS.

By VILHJÁLMUR STEFÁNSSON. With Illustrations. 8vo.

WITH THE RUSSIAN PILGRIMS TO JERUSALEM.

By STEPHEN GRAHAM. With 38 Illustrations from Photographs by the Author and a Route Map. 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.* net.

TRAVELS IN TURKEY.

By Sir MARK SYKES, Bart., M.P. With Illustrations and Maps. 8vo.

IMPRESSIONS OF CANADA.

By FLORENCE PARBURY. With 16 Coloured Plates and 40 Pages of Illustrations. 8vo.

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS IN THE BORDER.

By ANDREW LANG and JOHN LANG. With Illustrations by Hugh Thomson. Extra crown 8vo. Gilt top. 5*s.* net.

[*Highways and Byways Series.*

A LEISURELY TOUR IN ENGLAND.

By J. J. HISSEY. With 32 Illustrations from Photographs taken by the Author. 8vo. 10*s.* net.

HUNTING THE ELEPHANT IN AFRICA.

By Captain C. H. STIGAND. With an Introduction by Theodore Roosevelt. Illustrated. 8vo.

ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

THE ART OF BOTTICELLI. AN ESSAY IN INTERPRETATION.

By LAURENCE BINYON. With 23 Colour Collotypes, and an Original Etching by Muirhead Bone, signed by the Artist. Limited to 275 copies. Royal 4to. £12 12*s.* net.

THE GOSPEL STORY IN ART.

By JOHN LA FARGE. Illustrated with 80 Plates reproduced from Famous Paintings. 4to. 15*s.* net.

JUST SO STORIES.

By RUDYARD KIPLING. With Illustrations by the Author, and 12 additional Illustrations in Colour by Joseph M. Gleeson. 4to. 6*s.* net.

THE FAIRY BOOK.

The best popular Fairy Stories, selected and rendered anew by Mrs. Craik. With 32 Illustrations in Colour by Warwick Goble. Crown 4to. 15*s.* net.

ESSAYS, ETC.

THOMAS HARDY'S WESSEX.

By HERMANN LEA. Fully Illustrated from Photographs by the Author. 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.* net. Uniform with the Wessex Edition of the Novels and Poems.

SĀDHANĀ: THE REALISATION OF LIFE.

By RABINDRANATH TAGORE, Author of "Gitanjali." Extra crown 8vo.

ESSAYS, POLITICAL AND LITERARY.

By the EARL OF CROMER, O.M. 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

THE LIFE OF EDWARD BULWER, FIRST LORD LYTTON.

By HIS GRANDSON. With Photogravure Portrait and other Illustrations. 2 vols. 8vo. 30*s.* net.

MACAULAY'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

Edited by CHARLES HARDING FIRTH, M.A., Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford. With 900 Illustrations, including 44 in Colour. Uniform with the Illustrated Edition of Green's "Short History of the English People." In 6 vols. Published Quarterly. Super Royal 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.* net each.

FIFTY YEARS OF MY LIFE.

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT. Illustrated. 8vo.

RECOLLECTIONS.

By GEORGE HENSCHEL, Mus.Doc. 8vo.

LOLLARDY AND THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND.

By DR. JAMES GAIRDNER, C.B. Vol. IV. Edited by William Hunt, M.A., D.Litt. 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

HUNGARY'S FIGHT FOR NATIONAL EXISTENCE; or, THE HISTORY OF THE GREAT UPRISING LED BY FRANCIS RAKOCZI II., 1703-1711.

By LADISLAS BARON HENGELMÜLLER. With an Introduction by Theodore Roosevelt. 8vo.

BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

THE LIFE OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.

By Sir EDWARD COOK. With Photogravure Portraits. 2 vols. 8vo. 30*s.* net.

A FATHER IN GOD : THE EPISCOPATE OF WILLIAM WEST JONES, D.D., Archbishop of Capetown and Metropolitan of South Africa, 1874—1908.

By MICHAEL H. M. WOOD, M.A., late Scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, Diocesan Librarian of the Diocese of Capetown. With Introduction by the Ven. W. H. Hutton, B.D., and Portraits and other Illustrations. 8vo. 18*s.*

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MAHARSHI DEVENDRANATH TAGORE [Father of Rabindranath Tagore, author of "Gitanjali."] With Introduction by Evelyn Underhill. 8vo.

JANE AUSTEN.

By F. WARRE CORNISH, late Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, Vice-Provost of Eton College. Crown 8vo. 2*s.* net.

[*English Men of Letters.*

PICCADILLY

By ARTHUR IRWIN DASENT, Author of "The History of St. James's Square." With Portraits and other Illustrations. 8vo.

POETRY

THE WORKS OF TENNYSON.
With Notes by the Author. Edited with Memoir by HALLAM, LORD TENNYSON. With Portrait. Extra crown 8vo. 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

SONGS FROM BOOKS.
By RUDYARD KIPLING. Crown 8vo. 6*s.* Pocket Edition. Fcap. 8vo. Cloth, 4*s.* 6*d.* net. Limp Leather, 5*s.* net. Edition de Luxe, 8vo, 10*s.* 6*d.* net.

THE CRESCENT MOON. CHILD-POEMS.
By RABINDRANATH TAGORE. With 8 Illustrations in Colour. Pott 4to. 4*s.* 6*d.* net.

THE GARDENER: POEMS.
By RABINDRANATH TAGORE. With Portrait. Crown 8vo. 4*s.* 6*d.* net.

THE SHORTER POEMS OF FREDERICK TENNYSON.
Edited, with an Introduction, by CHARLES TENNYSON. With Portrait. Cr. 8vo. 5*s.* net.

COLLECTED POEMS.
By A. E. Crown 8vo. 6*s.* net.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF NEWMAN HOWARD. Crown 8vo.

POEMS OF A. H. CLOUGH.
With an Introduction by Charles Whibley, and a Portrait. Crown 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.*

TRISTRAM AND ISOULT.
By MARTHA KINROSS. Crown 8vo. 3*s.* net.

THE BALLADS OF THÉODORE DE BANVILLE.
Translated by Archibald T. Strong. Crown 8vo.

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD.

R. Clay & Sons, Ltd., Brunswick St., S.E.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

RET TO
AUP
RECEIVED
JAN 21 1992
SEP 22 1992
ART LIBRARY

S R L F

SEE SPINE FOR BARCODE NUMBER

PR
6007
D7285j

